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DEADWOOD DICK'S DEVICE; or, The Sign of the Double Cross.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "DEATH-FACE, DETECTIVE,"
"WATCH-EYE," "CANADA CHET," ETC., ETC.



"STOP!" SHE SAID, AUTHORITATIVELY.

Deadwood Dick's Device;

OR,

The Sign of the Double Cross.

A WILD, STRANGE TALE OF THE LEADVILLE MINES—OF MEN OF STEEL—OF TOUGHS AND TIGERS—OF ROAD-AGENTS, REGULATORS, AVENGERS, ADVENTURERS—AND OF THE THRILLING LIFE IN THE NEW ELDERADO.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS; "ROSE-BUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DAVID HOWELL'S WILL.

A STORM WAS UPON LEADVILLE.

Such a storm as is not usual in that high latitude—a regular tornado of wind, together with a copious shower of rain, and the play of lightning combined with the roll of thunder. From noon of a warm spring day it had been gathering in the heavens, in threatening puffs of black and gray, with that purple tinge to the horizon suggestive of a concealed riot.

Then had the heavens grown darker and darker, as well as the day. At the first rumble of the heavy thunder men came from the mines, and shook their heads doubtfully. They had about as well run the risk of their life below ground, as to face the elements above.

Business was suspended in the town until lamps could be lighted; indeed, few could do anything but stand and watch the strange shapes and colors of the clouds that every instant threatened to spill their contents over the mountain metropolis.

A man was riding toward the town from in the direction of the mountains, at a rapid gallop—a man enveloped in a heavy cloak, with a slouch hat so drawn down over his face as to hide his identity, which evidently was his purpose.

As he rode he glanced skyward occasionally, as if anxious that the storm should hold off until he reached the town, yet distant a couple of miles.

The narrow road or trail over which he galloped, was lined with stunted pines, and an undergrowth of young chaparral, which gave it a gloomy appearance, even in daytime, to say nothing of its night somberness.

There was an occasional cabin scattered along the trail, but they were generally vacant, having been built and deserted by stampedees—a class of miners who invade every strike, but "pull out" at the first warning for better pastures.

The horse upon which the rider was mounted, was a large thoroughbred bay, with an abundance of life and spirit, and it needed but a word from its master to quicken its pace.

"On! Spot! on, old fellow, or we'll surely get a ducking!" the rider said, studying the angry face of the heavens. "I do not care about offering myself as a target for a hurricane. It is going to be a hard pull for the town, down there on the plateau, and the morning's paper of tomorrow will have a whole column of obituary news about broken window-panes and dismantled roofs, if I mistake not. Hello!"

He involuntarily drew rein as a woman glided from the chaparral, in front of his horse, and waved her hand for him to stop. He had not the slightest idea as to what she wanted, but courtesy combined with curiosity, caused him to give her audience.

"Stop!" she said, authoritatively; and the horseman saw her pull the veil down closer over her face. "Stop a bit, sir! You are wanted at the Dead Pine Tract."

"I, madam?" the stranger echoed, in evident surprise. "Pray explain—"

"There is nothing to explain, more than I have told you. You are wanted at the cabin of Dave Howell, on the Dead Pine Tract, and if you're at all anxious to strike a fat pan, you'll sit along."

And turning, the woman glided back into the chaparral, as mysteriously as she had come.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" the horseman muttered, watching her retreat until she had disappeared. "If I was inclined to believe in manifestations, I should say I had received a call. The woman was too cleverly disguised for one to recognize her, nor do I think I have ever heard her voice."

A few drops of rain upon the leaves above

him, and a glance at the whitish gray and purple sky, seemed to decide the rider as to his course.

"I will go to Dead Pine Tract," he declared. "It is a good way of avoiding the storm, and if it is a trap for me, as I more than half suspect, I've a pair of tools in my belt that have never gone back on me, to my recollection."

And with a low laugh, the incognito gave rein to his horse, and galloped away in a course opposite to that which he had been pursuing.

The wind increased to a very gale, carrying with it dust, leaves, sticks and rain, and the thunder boomed a deep angry solo to the lightning's flash. Still the lone horseman spurred on, bravely fighting his way through the now fierce tornado, which howled around him like so many infuriated demons.

At last, however, he struck into a section of timbered country, almost within sight of Leadville, which bore the name of Dead Pine Tract, from the fact that every pine tree in the piece of timber was dead—a tall gaunt trunk only standing with seamed sides to tell where the fatal lightning had left its mark during some former storm.

Here the wind did not strike so heavily, for the tract was protected on the east by an abrupt line of hills that checked the force of the low-flying winds of the howling land hurricane.

Threading the forest of dead pines by way of a well-beaten trail, the horseman soon emerged into a glade comprising some fifteen acres which had been but rudely cleared of logs and debris, and containing two buildings—a cabin, and a large slab shed over the mouth of a shaft.

"This must be the place where I am wanted," the rider muttered, guiding his horse up to the door, and drawing rein. "This must be the famous Howell mine, of which the Leadville papers have been incessantly blowing. A rich strike, too, they say—equal to the Little Pittsburgh on Freyer Hill."

There seemed to be no life about the premises, judging from external appearances; so, dismounting and tethering his horse, the stranger rapped smartly on the door.

After a few moments footsteps were audible crossing the floor, and the door was opened by a Chinaman—a cunning, mischievous-looking, almond eyed son of Confucius he was, too, clad in the style customary with his class.

"Whatee 'Melican man wantee?" he demanded, looking so serious as to appear most comical.

"I wish to know what I'm wanted for, as much as anything," the stranger replied, banteringly. "I was sent here by a veiled woman, who remarked that my presence was desirable in this cabin. Show me in, you pig-tailed rascal!"

The Celestial obeyed, and the stranger found himself in a large rudely furnished room, containing such traps and trimmings as you will find in any miner's hut—i. e. cooking utensils, while a table and bed occupied a large portion of the space.

A man lay upon the bed, evidently suffering great pain, for his face was contorted, and his eyes bulged wildly from their sockets. He was very thin and bony, and his haggard appearance was increased by the ragged condition of his garments.

A man sat upon a stool by the stove, frying some meat—a rough, common looking personage, who did not look as if he was gifted with more than an ordinary stock of brains.

The person upon the bed looked up eagerly, as he heard footsteps crossing the floor, and saw the stranger standing above him. His eyes seemed to grow less wild in their glare, and the expression upon his features less rigid.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in a hoarse, gasping tone; "who sent you?"

"My name is Harris; Edward Harris, at your service," the stranger replied, turning down his collar and raising his hat, thereby revealing a handsome, manly face. "I came hither at the instigation of a veiled woman, who intercepted me back here in the forest."

"It is well. She kept her word to me. Your name is Edward Harris, eh?"

"At your service—at least, such is the name I choose to sail under."

"Harris! Harris!" the old man muttered, thoughtfully, as if trying to recall some past and gone memory. "Edward Harris! It seems to me that that name has reached my hearing before—ah! yes! I knew I was not wrong;—Edward Harris—Deadwood Dick!"

"The same, originally!" the stranger by the bedside replied. "Have you a grudge against Deadwood Dick?"

"None!" the old man answered, with a

chuckle. "Deadwood Dick never did me any harm, and is not likely to, since he was lynched, but a few days ago, in Leadville. As to the similarity in your names, it is not singular, for Harris is not an uncommon name."

"Perhaps not," the stranger replied, with a smile. "If there is anything I can do for you, be pleased to state what."

"Yes! yes! I had almost forgotten that time is flying, and ushering me into eternity. For, as you may have observed, I am dying, young man—dying, and suffering the most acute pain. Life won't hang to me much longer, and I may as well sum up my business, at once. Are you married, Edward Harris?"

"I am a widower," Deadwood Dick replied, a cloud coming over his face.

"It is well. I know you would be a kind husband; your very presence seems to tell me so. Now listen, and I shall tell you my plans. I am known as a miser, in this section of the country, because I chose to remain a recluse, and refused to share my gains with the world—with the world, understand you, which grasps everything in its way with a merciless gripe. Never did a hungry human leave my cabin, or a distressed one—yet they call me a miser, because I would not share with the rich—because I couldn't find it convenient to let a pack of greedy relatives step into my shoes."

"I have a brother and his family, who are anxious to have me die, so that they can step into my shoes. They have even set spies to watch me, and see that I leave my property to no one else but them. But those spies have relinquished the job, and I have yet life enough to outwit my eager relatives. Ay! I'll cut them off without a penny, for I hate them, even as they hate me."

He paused for a moment as if racked by pain or passion.

"Until a few days ago, I had a child to watch over me, but they came and took her away, supposing that my will would place her in possession of my property, and as her guardian they could have the handling of it, and ultimately swindle her out of it. But, we shall see them balked in their designs. Be seated, young man, and, you Cherub, bring the table nearer, with ink, pen, and paper—also the little tin safe I keep in the red chest."

While Edward Harris became seated, the Chinaman hastened to obey the old man's orders, and the table with the requisite articles was soon drawn up close to the bedside.

David Howell was then bolstered up with pillows to a sitting position, so that he could write, with the table as a desk.

Before beginning operations, he drank deeply from a bottle he had in the bed; then he seized the pen in a hand that trembled like an aspen.

Write he did, however, upon the paper, although it was after a scrawling fashion. Steadily, although death seemed to cast its hovering shadow over him; nor did he speak until he had finished; his whole soul seemed to concentrate with the words that formed at the point of his pen upon the paper.

When he had made the last stroke, he laid the pen aside, and handed the paper to Ned Harris.

"Read it aloud! I can better tell, then, if it is as I desire," he said, sinking back exhausted, upon the pillow.

Deadwood Dick did as directed, although he grew greatly surprised, as he read.

The document read as follows, having appended thereunto the date, and place:

"Being in sound and sane state of mind, and knowing that my death is but a matter of a few hours, I, David Howell, miner, of the town of Leadville, State of Colorado, do make my last will and testament, and append my signature in the presence of witnesses, and in the presence of my God.

"To Edward Harris, more widely known under the nick-name or *nom de plume* of Deadwood Dick, I do bequeath the whole of my real estate and personal property as it stands, unincumbered by debt or mortgage, said real estate being tract of land known as the Dead Pine Tract, containing fifteen acres, and the Howell carbonate mine, together with one cabin and one shed, and personal property embracing the contents of said mine, shed and cabin, such as tools, fixtures, furniture, etc.

"To said Deadwood Dick, I do bequeath the guardianship of my daughter, Stella Howell, who, at the time of this writing, is in the custody of her uncle, Major Morton Howell, of Leadville, Col.; said Deadwood Dick to assume her protection and support until she is of legal age, when, if there be a mutual agreement between them, they shall marry, and keep the bequest among them and their posterity. In case of no marriage, the first clause of my will to hold good, making Edward Harris, *alias* Deadwood Dick, my sole heir.

"To my relatives at large, I leave one penny apiece, which my heir will hand to them, when he reads to

them this will, and also my dying blessing, which I have no doubt they will appreciate.

"Signed upon my death-bed.

"DAVID R. HOWELL.

"Witnessed by { EDWARD HARRIS,
MOSE MOBRAV."

Ned Harris and the miner at the stove appended their signatures, and the last will and testament of the owner of Dead Pine Tract was made.

"It's as it should be," the dying man said, when the last stroke of the pen had been made. "It places the property forever out of the reach of my designing brother, who has been figuring for it the best he knew how."

"True!" Deadwood Dick said, "but you are placing your property and the life of your child in the hands of a man you know little about, just to spite your own kindred. Is this not very eccentric?"

"Perhaps so, young man, but it is my will. If you are the original Deadwood Dick I have no fears for my Star, or for my wealth, for often have I heard of Deadwood Dick as a man, who, though a road-agent, was a man of honor and integrity. Besides, you are the one man to hold your own, here on Dead Pine Tract, for blood will be spilled ere the dispute for the ownership will end. Mark you, you will have to play a strong hand or they will oust you. They will fight like devils for the mine, and if you would keep it, the name of Deadwood Dick must again ring abroad, a synonym of terror."

A quiet smile stole around the lips of the great ex-road-agent.

"Let them come!" he said, coolly. "You have made me legally your heir, and I shall hold the mine as you have directed. Your daughter shall be treated with marked care and respect, and you need have no fear that she will come to want, while in my care. Is that all you have to say?"

"Nearly. The tin safe there contains the Recorder's deed of the claim, which you may need to fight with! Beware that they do not steal them from you, for then they would have you in their power, completely."

"Never fear," Deadwood Dick replied, with a cool laugh. "I can fight them to the death, for having died once and returned, Phenix-like, to life, I don't calculate that death ought to have so many terrors to me, as it once did."

"How did you escape?"

"That is a little secret I don't care to reveal. I was brought back to life by my dear friend, the Girl Sport, otherwise known as Calamity Jane. She did a good job, and shall yet be rewarded. Now, about this mine—have you any hands at work in it?"

"None. I discharged them all this morning, when I felt death coming over me. The Chinaman, here, I give to you, with the assurance that you can place implicit trust in him. Mose Mobray, yonder, has been merely a worker for me, to cook my mess, since my Stella was abducted."

"They shall remain upon the Tract, if I find them faithful," Deadwood Dick assured.

The storm now burst forth with redoubled fury, and the new heir to the Howell mine sent Cherub to take his horse in under the shelter of the shed by the shaft-mouth.

As the storm waged wild, the dying miner seemed to grow proportionately wild and restless, groaning aloud, and sometimes shrieking in agony, either caused by pain or a tortured conscience.

The man Mobray administered such medicines as were at hand, but they seemed to have little or no effect.

To Deadwood Dick this was a new epoch in his strangely eventful life, and he could but wonder how the venture or adventure was going to end.

His mind reverted to the strange veiled woman who had summoned him to this dying man's side, and he wondered how she was connected with the future, for he felt that she was destined to appear again, either as friend or foe.

The tornado finally spent its force, and the wind went down, while the sun burst forth over a scene of havoc and desolation, caused by the storm—trees torn down or uprooted, buildings unroofed, and paneless, and a profusion of debris hurled every where.

The sun also shone in the window of the cabin on Dead Pine Tract, and lighted the path of David Howell from one world to another, for, as the storm abated, he sunk rapidly, and breathed his last in a few minutes after the sunlight came to beckon him.

CHAPTER II.

DEADWOOD DICK STANDS HIS GROUND.

AFTER arranging with the miner, Mose Mobray, to see that the dead man was decently interred, Deadwood Dick mounted his horse and rode away toward Leadville. His first motive was to ride to the house of Major Howell, and acquaint him with the state of affairs. Donning a heavy false mustache and goatee, before entering the town, he rode in by the main street, fearlessly. Handsome, dashing, dauntless he looked, as he sat his saddle with the best of grace and ease—a thoroughbred knight of the road, such as he had been in the past.

But Deadwood Dick had been lynched, and the throbbing, surging mass of humanity he encountered, merely gazed upon him as an ordinary "pilgrim," not dreaming that he had passed through the jaws of death and was back among them a free man. For no one now could dispute that he had paid the full penalty of the law.

The Howells were a leading family, both financially and socially—for Leadville, mind you, has its social world as well as its eastern sister cities, formed out of that class whom fortune has smiled upon. And surrounded by a great superfluity of style, pomp and splendor, they set themselves up as the "superior class," ye gods!

It was among these aristocratic circles that the Howell family moved, and being possessed of considerable style, power, influence and cash, they were looked up to as one of the "first families" in Leadville, and held themselves austere aloof from the commoner citizens and their families; to such an extent, it may be said, that they had but few friends and many foes, who made fun of them from the street corners as they passed by.

Upon one of the more aristocratic streets they lived in a modern mansion, newly completed, and furnished throughout with the greatest taste and elegance.

Deadwood Dick found the place by a little inquiry, and dismounting, he fastened Spot, and ascending the polished steps, rung the bell.

An ebony son of Africa soon appeared.

"Here is my card," Deadwood Dick said, tendering a card. "Please hand it to your master, sir."

The negro skurried hastily away, leaving Dick standing upon the steps. He soon returned, however, his face nearly disjoined by a huge grin.

"De massa says as how I'se to tell you he's not at home!" the fellow stammered.

"Then you go tell him he's a liar!" Deadwood Dick ordered, "and that I've important business. If he don't grant me an interview, I'll waltz in there and tumble him out of doors, head-foremost."

The darky disappeared again, but when he returned he ushered Deadwood Dick into a long elaborately-frescoed hall, and up a staircase which was carpeted with velvet.

Upon the first floor front, in an apartment fit for a prince, was the reception parlor and office combined, of the speculator. Into this Ned Harris was ushered, and likewise into the presence of Major Howell.

He was a portly individual, with a florid countenance, steel-gray eyes, and flaxen hair and mustache—a man who looked as if fast living and dissipation had been his worst enemies. He was clad in a suit of blue broadcloth, and wore a liberal display of jewelry.

He arose from his easy-chair with a cold bow, as Harris entered, and motioned him toward a seat.

"Be seated, sir, if you have business with me," he said, crustily, "and be so kind as to state the nature of your errand, at once."

"Yours truly!" Deadwood Dick replied, carelessly, as he accepted the seat, and took out a cigar-case. Smoke?

"No, thank you; I do not use tobacco."

"Don't smoke? Well, you're just like me—I do. Sometimes I enjoy a good cigar, but tastes differ, I notice. You are the Honorable Major Howell, I presume?"

"Exactly so, sir."

"Then you are the man I want to see. I came to bring you sad news—news which, if you are possessed of a sensitive nature, must wring your heart with grief."

"You probably intend to herald the death of my brother?" Major Howell interrogated, eagerly.

"I do. He expired not an hour since."

"Then, I am much obliged to you for your interest in informing me. Having known for

several days past that he must die, I am not shocked."

"I observe not," Deadwood Dick replied, contemptuously. "You will perhaps be more shocked, however, when you hear the contents of David Howell's will."

"What! what is this you say? He *did* leave a will behind?" the speculator gasped, with a start.

"He did, most assuredly. I was summoned to Dead Pine Tract, and saw him draw, sign and witness the document."

The major sprung to his feet, excitedly, and paced to and fro across the soft carpet.

"To whom did he leave the mine?" he finally demanded, pausing in front of Deadwood Dick, with frowning mien. "Tell me—did he leave it to his daughter, Stella?"

"Be seated, and you shall hear," Harris said, taking the document from his pocket, and unfolding it. "Here is a correct copy of the will."

And then in a clear, distinct tone he read the testament of the miner, word for word, until he had arrived at the end.

Then he looked up, to behold Major Howell upon his feet, livid with passion, and his hands opening and shutting like the claws of some infuriated beast.

"You—you the heir of David Howell's property?" he said, in a hissing tone; "you? 'Tis false, curse you—'tis false! That will is a forgery—a damnable plot of yours to cheat me out of the mine!"

"Begging thy pardon, all the same, you are mistaken!" Deadwood Dick said, coolly. "The property was legally and lawfully willed to me, and I am bound to keep it. Also, the girl, Stella!"

"You shall not have her. She is in my possession, and hang me if I don't keep her. While, as to you and the mine, I'll soon fire you out, and the mine will be mine. That I swear to, by all I hold sacred!"

"I'm afraid we shall have to argue that case, and if so, it will be at the point of knife and pistol!" Deadwood Dick said, significantly.

"You probably have heard of Deadwood Dick, and when I tell you that I am he, you will please do yourself the justice to remember that I am a bad man to fool around."

"You lie! you are not Deadwood Dick. He was lynched, in town, here, but a short time ago."

"True, but like the Phenix he has risen from his ashes, and now stands before you!"

"Then, by Heaven, you shall go back to the scaffold, and hang again!" the major cried, savagely. "I'll see that the noose fits tighter this time."

"You will do nothing of the kind," Dick replied, with sudden fierceness. "You will calmly think the matter over, and conclude that it is best not to arouse my enmity toward you!"

"Bah! a fig for you or your enmity, sir road-agent. I have the power to have you taken and strung up at any minute, and you'll find it out directly, too. As to my niece, I shall appoint myself her guardian until she is of age, or marries. Now, sir, leave my house, or by the Great Eternal, I'll have you forcibly ejected, in a manner none too gentle."

"Then I'll save you that trouble," Dick said, rising with a cool laugh. "I have no desire of remaining where my presence is so undesirable. Look out for me, however. If you intend to fight with me for the Dead Pine Tract, you will have not only me to fight but a host of men as firm and true as steel. Adieu, sir major!"

And turning on his heel with a haughty bow, the ex-road-agent quitted the room.

Major Howell followed him until he saw him leave the house; then he returned to his room, cursing furiously.

"Ten thousand furies seize that fellow! He is my enemy, henceforth, and one I need have cause to fear, for he never leaves a wrong unavenged, nor a fancied insult unpunished. Curse him! curse the brother of mine, who made that will! But it must not be so—it shall not be so; the Howell mine shall belong to me, and that before many days. I will wait until Alfred comes, and he may have some plan to offer. The mine is one of the richest in all Leadville, and there is room enough to put down several more shafts on the same property. For that reason, the bequest of David Howell is mine and clearly mad was he, in willing the tract away from his own relatives to a total stranger, and that man the notorious Deadwood Dick."

The following morning the Leadville News contained an article something as follows, which

of course threw the town into a commotion of surprise and profound wonderment.

This is what it said:

"DEADWOOD DICK AGAIN."

"Those who witnessed the execution of this notable criminal, will no doubt be astonished to learn that he is still alive, and was in town last evening, a *free man*, for, having been hanged by the neck once, until pronounced dead, there is no law that can touch him for past offenses. How he ever came to life is a mystery nobody can solve, unless he was resuscitated by the notorious female, known as Calamity Jane. Our new sheriff, Lieutenant France, has been meditating upon a plan of arresting Sir Dick, but has not arrived at a definite conclusion. It is to be hoped, however, that the people will take the law into their own hands, and give the notorious Richard another boost!"

The result of this piece of information was to set the town literally on "edge," and every man and his neighbor kept an eye out for the ex-road-agent, while hands were ready to give him the second h'ist suggested by Leadville's flourishing representative newspaper, the *News*.

The sentiments of public and paper seemed identical.

That evening saw a large crowd assembled at the Coliseum, which is, or was then, the principal theater of the town, and the only one giving a decent variety performance. Business for several weeks previous had been falling off, but the new announcements for the week, such as the Fontainebleau Children, Miss Coral De Vere, Fanny Farron, and a few others, served to pack the rude little theater.

The crowd was largely composed of men, although a few miners had brought their families along, to witness the sport, seeing no harm in it—there being none in reality, except for the fact that the patrons were generally a rough, lawless set, and that liquor was served among the audience.

The performance was made up of several negro farces, the Fontainebleaus in pantomimes and dances, Coral De Vere in athletic feats, and Miss Fanny Farron, the star of the evening, in fancy pistol practice, and later, in serio-comic songs, after which the stock company appeared in a blood-curdling drama, the hero of which was billed as Wildcat Jack.

To Fanny Farron, however, was bestowed the lion's share of the applause by the rough audience, for being an adept in the art of pistol practice, she easily won her way into their rude but strangely enthusiastic admiration.

She was in one sense a beautiful woman. But nineteen or twenty years had passed over her head; she was spirited and rosy; her form was an admirable embodiment of elegant womanhood and perfect grace of movement, while her face was of nature's happiest mold, the features all pleasing and gifted with sweetness of expression, that in turn shone from her dusky blue eyes. Her complexion was light, and a wealth of hair of corresponding color fell in a glossy wave over her plump shoulders.

Taken at a glance she was a charming and beautiful creature—at least, she so appeared, as viewed from the auditorium of the theater.

During her pistol practice the man, Wildcat Jack, who was to act in drama, served her in the capacity of assistant, and he seemed to mark the triumphs with an envious eye.

He was a dark, swarthy-looking fellow, with a brigandish mustache, and the general air of a lawless character, which he was to impersonate in the drama. But he was after the type of his audience, and was of course admired by them. Back of the pit, in the auditorium, was an elevated platform, on a level with the stage, or higher, where a bar was kept, and where late comers who could not find seats, were permitted to stand.

To-night it was occupied by several loungers, prominent among whom were several who are to play parts in this romance of the King City of the Colorado.

Calamity Jane stood leaning against a pillar that supported the gallery, watching the performance with indifferent interest.

Old Avalanche stood near by, and another personage who was none other than Deadwood Dick, was seated near the edge of the platform smoking a cigar.

The stormy applause which had followed the conclusion of Fanny Farron's pistol practice, had not yet died out, when a pistol-shot rung through the theater, and the bullet cut away the feather p.ume that ornamented the ex-road-agent's hat.

At the same time a half-dozen men sprung

from their seats in the auditorium, and made a rush toward the spot where Deadwood Dick had now gained his feet, a cocked revolver in either hand.

"Hurrah! fifty dollars to the man who captures the outlaw, Deadwood Dick! Yonder he stands, my hearties. Take him!" cried a voice, and the new sheriff, Lieutenant France, leaped to the front.

"Halt! stand back there! If you come a step further, I'll fill you so full of cold lead that you won't be able to swim for a month. Stand back, you cowardly dogs, if you don't want to bite the dust!"

It was Calamity Jane who gave the last command, in a ringing voice, and a leap brought her beside Ned Harris, who coolly stood his ground.

The tools of the sheriff hesitated.

Enough of the prowess of the Girl Sport had they seen, since her coming to Leadville, to believe that she would shoot, did they disobey; and then, Deadwood Dick stood ready for the battle, with Old Avalanche on his left, thus forming a dangerous trio.

The whole audience had arisen to their feet, and knives and revolvers were promiscuously displayed, while a silence, almost painfully intense, seemed for a moment to reign.

"Surrender!" Sheriff France said, sternly. "Tis no use for you to resist, sir outlaw!"

"I will not surrender!" Deadwood Dick replied, coolly. "Neither am I an outlaw. By hanging, I expiated my crimes, and having been brought back to life, I am lawfully a free man!"

"The hanging was but a farce, and you've got to swing again!" France shouted, angrily.

"At him, boys! He's your game, if you have a mind to take him!"

"Halt!" Deadwood Dick cried again, sharply, and the men obeyed his command. "If you come a step further, you come at your peril. As a free man, I have a right to protect myself. If you make a move to lay a hand on me, your life shall pay the forfeit, and the crime will rest upon your own heads. Three we are, to be sure, but you will learn that self-defenders can shoot as straight and true as the pangs of death."

"Bet yer boots on that!" Calamity added, a sparkle of enthusiasm in her eyes. "Thar'll many a pilgrim kiss *terra firma*, before Deadwood Dick again stretches hemp!"

"Great ham-bone, yes. Kerwhoop! Come on, ye infernal galoots, ef ye want to snag yerselves ag'in' a consarned cyclone—a ragin' bull-storm o' boreal annihilation, imported right down from ther northern lattytudes and longy-toads! Come on, I tell ye, if ye want ter find ther straight and undeviatin' trail ter Brimstun Lake! We're ther b'yes an' gal as kin steer yer cumpus, ballasted wi' lead purgatory pellets!"

But the gang hesitated; certain death stared him in the face who made the initiatory step; consequently none there were eager to court the grim King of Terrors.

Thus the situation was, when the curtain suddenly rung up, and Fanny Farron stepped forward to the footlights, clad in a dashing costume, the skirt being short, and the arms bare, but richly bejeweled.

The orchestra struck up, and played the accompaniments to a popular song; then the voice of a star burst forth in a fascinating song, the words and the music being singularly sweet and entrancing.

One by one the crowd turned and resumed their seats, until but a half a dozen composed the tableau upon the auditorium. By the magic influence of her voice and her wondrous presence, the songstress had won over the crowd!

Only the few remained, and seeing that they took no notice of her, the young woman made a motion to the orchestra and they struck up a piece of jig music.

Then, seizing a rope that was tossed to her, she began the skipping-rope dance, her small feet playing in perfect time with the music.

This was the act that moved the rough audience to a wild tumult of clamorous applause, which continued so long as the little foot-like fairy continued to dance.

Even Sheriff France and his men were forced to turn and admire and applaud! And during this juncture Calamity Jane touched Deadwood Dick upon the arm.

"Now's yer time!" she whispered. "There's a door behind you; back out!"

"Never!" Dick replied. "This thing may as well be settled here as anywhere else, and I'm going to see it out if it costs my life."

CHAPTER III.

THE BATTLE—DEADWOOD DICK'S WARNING.

"THEN I'm with you to the death!" Calamity said, sternly. "But don't put too much confidence in that woman, yonder. She is a viper—a she-devil, gifted with a pleasant face and attractive form. Look out for her!"

"What do you know about her?" Deadwood Dick demanded, in a low, surprised tone. "When did you ever know her?"

"Never at all, but I am not a student of human nature for nothing. Mark my words, she is a *fraud*."

The fairy of the footlights now ceased her dancing amid a tremendous tumult of applause, but instead of retiring, she advanced to the footlights.

"My audience!" she said, in a clear, ringing voice, that had in it a subtle power of attraction, "I thank you kindly for your appreciation, and I feel that I have already warmed your rough, rude natures toward me. This is just what I want. I want you all to be my friends, and to all come here and hear me sing. But, there is one thing I must ask of you—that you will lay no hand of harm upon Deadwood Dick. If you do, I have sung for you the last time."

Then she turned and tripped behind the scenes, while the crowds in the auditorium hooted and applauded until grown hoarse.

"Death to Deadwood Dick!" shouted Sheriff France at the top of his voice. "A hundred dollars to the man that captures the road-agent, dead or alive."

This offer put a new aspect on affairs.

A score of men sprung toward the platform, with drawn revolvers.

"Surrender!" ordered France. "Tis useless to resist!"

"No, 'tis not useless!" Deadwood Dick cried. "If you take me at all, it shall be *dead*—never alive!"

And raising a cocked revolver in either hand, he shot down two of the foremost men quicker than a flash. Then, in concert with Calamity Jane and Old Avalanche, he poured in a deadly fire, every bullet counting a death-yell.

The theater was a pandemonium of wild, strange sounds; on every hand rung the deadly report of revolvers, while a panic-stricken crowd struggled frantically to find egress from the building.

Bullets flew like scattered hail; wild yells and screams of victory or agony played a weird accompaniment to the revolver's crack.

One by one the lamps were fanned out by the flying bullets, until darkness reigned complete within the theater.

But upon the platform Deadwood Dick still stood his ground, while Calamity Jane and Old Avalanche were at his side, fighting determinedly, knowing that life and death depended upon the issue.

Below the platform the howling mob still surged, firing constantly, but not often coming within a foot of either of the defending trio. Yet so great were their numbers that they were inevitably bound to wipe out the brave defenders, unless help reached them.

Deadwood Dick realized this, but he was bound not to surrender alive.

"Back! back, you dogs, or every galoot's life shall answer for this fight!" he cried, in a ringing voice.

At this juncture Fanny Farron and a half-dozen men reached the platform by way of a side hallway from the stage, and joined their forces with Deadwood Dick and his crowd, their weapons but adding to the horrible din.

The effect of the reinforcement was visibly felt by the attacking mob, for they flinched, and finally broke in wild confusion, each man struggling to force his way out of the theater.

The result was that the whole audience were soon fighting among themselves.

"Come!" Deadwood Dick now said, when he saw this, touching Calamity on the shoulder. "Fetch Avalanche and let's hunt a way out of here. We've given 'em enough taste for one night, what with the scrimmage they're now engaged in."

"Here! you must come with me!" Fanny Farron said, touching him upon the arm. "I will show you to a place of safety, until you can escape from the town!"

And seizing him by the coat-sleeve, she led the way back through the side hall to the stage, behind the curtain, Calamity and Old Avalanche bringing up the rear. Behind the curtain the lamps were still lit, and they were enabled to see each other.

Fanny Farron was still clad in her stage-dress, with a heavy waterproof thrown about her shoulders, and a closer examination reveal-

ed that she was even as handsome as she had appeared upon the stage. Her skin was fair and pure, her teeth even and white, and her mouth sweetly fascinating in its expression.

Deadwood Dick gazed at her, admiringly, for a few moments; then turned to Calamity and Avalanche.

"Are either of you hurt?"

"I am not," the Girl Sport replied, coolly. "Old Avalanche must answer for himself."

"Great ham-bone that shivered the timbers of old Joner, no, I ain't harmed," the Annihilator replied, with a chuckle of triumph. "Didn't git stung onct, though the bullets hummed ther Dology around my years like fun!"

"Then I guess it is a lucky termination of the battle, for us," Dick said. "Lady, if you will show us the way to the open air, I shall be much obliged to you."

Fanny Farron bowed, and led the way through a wing entrance out into a back yard in the rear of the theater. An alley led from this to an adjoining street, which they soon gained.

"You had better all come to my hotel, until the storm blows over," the actress said, addressing Deadwood Dick. "You are at liberty to remain there until it is safe to leave the town."

"Thanks, lady, but I must decline your invitation," Dick answered, a spice of bitterness in his tone. "It is as safe now as it will ever be. To-night I have been forced again into crime, and am an outlaw, by the decree of the people. Let them look out, for I will not stop now, but they shall learn to fear my name as an omen of death. I thank you, lady, for the intervention in my behalf, to-night, and will repay you if ever the chance occurs. For the present I will say adieu!"

And turning, he strode away in a northerly direction, followed by Calamity and Old Avalanche.

Fanny Farron watched them a few moments, and then turned away with a low laugh in which was triumph.

"At last I have met the man after my own heart—wild and free," she muttered, a flush burning upon her cheeks, and a strange gleam in her dusky blue eyes.

"He is the man whom I could marry and love, unselfishly—and he is the man who shall yield to my fascination. The first seed planted to-night, the germ will quickly form, from which will grow the sprout of admiration, and then the stalk of love. Ha! ha! my Deadwood Dick, you little know that you are idolatrously loved by one woman, and that woman, pretty Fanny Farron."

On the steps before the Clarendon, where she boarded, the actress came face to face with the actor, Wildcat Jack.

"Ha! he exclaimed, springing forward, at sight of her, and raising her hand to his lips—'alive and safe, ma belle Fanny; and I am so glad!'"

"It is not your fault that I am alive!" the actress replied, jerking away her hand. "You are a coward, Jacques Frouch—a coward, and I despise you. Why did you leave when I wanted you to take part in the fight?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, significantly, and forced a sinister smile.

"It is my policy, ma'm'selle, to let every man fight his own battles. I finds it ze best, all around."

"Bah! If I had your cowardly nature, woman though I am, I'd poison myself!" Miss Farron assured, contemptuously, as she entered the hotel.

Frouch followed her up to the parlors.

"I hope ze ma'm'selle will forgive me!" he said, apologetically. "I didn't like to fight ze road-agent, for he looked like a bad man."

"Pshaw! lay aside your mongrel French! You know I despise it," the actress said, impatiently. "Why did you come here to torment me, Jacques Frouch? You know I dislike to be annoyed by your presence. You had much better be studying over and perfecting your dizzy drama."

"Hang the drama!" the actor growled, changing from his French accent to the pure American tongue. "It pleases the ruffianly element we cater to, and that is sufficient. I come again to wait upon you for an answer—"

"Stop!" Fanny Farron cried, suddenly stamping her foot, her eyes blazing. "I will hear no more of your proposals of marriage. I have already refused you a score of times, and let this be for the last time."

"No, not for the last time. You will yet change your opinion, and render a decision in my favor!" the Frenchman said, coolly. "You love me now, if you would only own the truth!"

"I do not love you," the actress cried, vehem-

ently. "I shall hate you, if you continue your annoying proposals. At every stand you have dogged my footsteps, for the last year. What satisfaction can you derive out of constant refusal?"

"The satisfaction of knowing that I will eventually win," Frouch replied.

"Then, let me tell you that disappointment will be the crowning of your hopes. Were I ten times to marry, it would not be you."

"Perhaps you would choose that gay road-agent devil, to whom you did the whole of your acting, this evening?"

"You couldn't have guessed closer!" was the cool answer. "He is the very man I am going to marry, if I have to spend a whole season in Leadville in order to do it. He is a man—the one man in a hundred whose glance has the power to stir my heart, or set my pulses bounding. To him I have already given my heart, and he shall not long be ignorant of the fact."

"We shall see him marry you—in your mind!" the Frenchman muttered, with a villainous chuckle, as he turned and left the room.

On the following morning the news of the fight in the variety theater was fully ventilated by the *Leadville News*, which was the principal organ against Deadwood Dick. A column of description of the affray wound up with an offer of two hundred dollars reward for the arrest or capture of the famous Prince of the Road.

But this time there were two sides to the case, for upon every approach to the town, a notice was posted as follows:

"FAIR WARNING."

"Whereas: Having recently expiated my crimes by being duly hanged, in Leadville, and having been restored to life after having been pronounced dead, and thereby rendered a free man by the law or laws of the United States of America; and—

"Whereas: As a free and lawful and law-abiding citizen, I was set upon and attacked by the people, in the Coliseum Theater, on the evening of the 6th inst., for the purpose of again being hung, contrary to the law, and its mandates:

"Resolved: That I issue a proclamation, claiming for myself entire innocence in causing the aforesaid riot, and charging the loss of life upon the people; and—

"Resolved: That, as the people refuse to receive me back as a citizen among them, preferring to raise their hand in war against me unto the death—

"Resolved: Finally, that I shall meet them as they have met me—that it shall be a bitter, bloody war to the knife, until they shall cry 'enough,' or the name of Deadwood Dick shall have become a thing of the past—a memento of a reign of terror that a vengeful populace brought upon their own heads. Every man, woman or child who shall raise, or shall have raised a hand of hostility against me, shall die, and ye all shall know how and why, by the sign of the Double Cross, which shall mark their bodies.

"Beware! for such is the warning I give to all. Let me alone, and I'll let you alone. Tickle me, and I'll tickle you!"

"DEADWOOD DICK!"

Major Howell read this notice, as he was riding out of town upon his horse, toward the Dead Pine Tract.

"Curse the luck! I dare not venture there alone, now, lest the young ruffian attack me. He is to be feared, evidently, if that row at the Coliseum is any illustration. Instead of going to the Tract, I will hunt up Alf, and we will see what we can do."

Riding back into town, he hitched his horse to a post on Chestnut street, and proceeded to make a tour of the saloons and gaming dens, for it was in one of these that he expected to find his son. And in passing along the street, he caught a glimpse of Fanny Farron, standing in the door of a dry goods store.

With a start of surprise the speculator half-stopped, to gaze at her a moment, his face flushing strangely.

But, as she paid no attention to him, he finally continued his walk, his face still wearing a puzzled expression.

"I could have sworn that it was she, at the first glance!" he muttered, hoarsely, "but I am probably mistaken. Her face is the same, nearly—curse me! why should I not know, for certain?"

But know he evidently did not, for a frown rested upon his face as he hurried on, from saloon to saloon.

Mr. Alfred Howell was not to be found, so easily, it seemed.

He was a scapegoat of a fellow, with little or no honor, or pride, and an inordinate passion for gambling and strong drink. A bitter disappointment was he to his mother and sisters, while the major got along the best with him of any of the family.

In the Casino, he was at last found, engaged

at a game of poker with a Chinaman; but he paid the wager, and threw up the game at a beckon from the major, and the two retired to a private stall, where they could talk unobserved and unheard.

An odd-looking individual this son of the speculator was—so odd as to attract notice, in any crowd. He was short and fat, with stumpy legs that had a tendency to bow; a capacious stomach, and a face that was so fat and swarthy as to be repulsive. Black eyes, hair, and mustache gave him the additional appearance of a first-class desperado, to say nothing of a greasy buckskin costume, an extraordinary broad-brimmed hat, and an infant "battery" of weapons in his belt.

He was the superintendent of several of the Freyer Hill mines, over which the major exercised control, and was generally known and feared as a lawless character.

When seated, Major Howell rapped for the drinks, by way of getting on the right side of his dutiful son, by his first wife.

"You've heard about the fight at the variety theater?" he interrogated.

"The devil! yes. I was in that row, and nearly got my brains blown out!"

"How did Deadwood Dick escape?"

"You can't prove it by me. Reckon he hed help from ther stage."

"I would give a thousand dollars if some one had killed him. As it stands he has possession of the Dead Pine Tract, and we cannot easily dislodge him, short of an army!"

"No?"

"Of course not. Have you not seen the posters he has up, on the outskirts of town?"

"Yes. What of them?"

"Well, do not they go to show that he means business?"

"Probably. But he shall not possess Dead Pine Tract, long. I've seen Beautiful Bill, and several other toughs, and I allow we can soon get enough together to take the Tract!"

"Have you sent a spy to keep watch of matters about the mine?"

"Yes. I sent Yuba Sam. He will report as soon as anything of importance occurs!"

"One thing more I wanted to ask you about. Have you seen a female in town who resembles—?" and here the major lowered his tone to a whisper, and uttered a name.

Alf Howell laughed.

"Why, yes. That's the singer at the Coliseum—Fanny Farron, she calls herself."

"What do you think about her? Do you not believe she might be the party I mentioned?"

"Pshaw! no. She's gone to the dogs, long ago. This girl is not the same."

"I wish I had proof of it."

"Pshaw! take my word for it she's a thousand leagues from here," the son persisted.

"Has Deadwood Dick yet communicated with Stella?"

"Not to my knowledge. I have directed Mrs. Howell to keep her indoors, until we can dispose of this road-agent!"

"That's right. If she but gets a glimpse of Deadwood Dick's face, my goose is cooked for getting her for myself."

"Perhaps you won't care about marrying her, if she does not get her claim on the Dead Pine Tract, eh?"

"Perhaps not!" the gambler chuckled, villainously. "My game's to play where I win the most. Hello! what's that?"

Two men had entered the Casino, bearing between them the body of a third individual, who was evidently dead.

"By Heaven!" Alf Howell cried, springing to his feet. "It's Yuba Sam, whom I sent to Dead Pine Tract!"

"Yes, and he's got the sign o' the Double Cross plumed upon his forehead!" added one of the bearers. "We found him a-lyin' on the trail, back heer, a piece, wi' a bullet-hole thru his buzzom."

It was even so.

Yuba Sam had died of a bullet wound through the region of his heart, and upon his forehead was slashed with a keen-bladed knife, two bloody crosses.

Deadwood Dick had opened his campaign of terror!

CHAPTER IV.

DONE IN DARKNESS—THE SPORT VS. BEAUTIFUL BILL.

NIGHT's grim shadows again settled down over Leadville. The heavens were overcast with skurrying clouds, and darkness reigned supreme, in the absence of the moon.

Few people were to be seen abroad, except in the heart of the town, for, terrified at the threat of Deadwood Dick, they preferred re-

maining indoors, rather than running the risk of the deadly vengeance of the famous Prince of the Road.

That Deadwood Dick was abroad at night none could doubt, for the night was known to be the time of his numerous depredations—a time best suited to his wild, dark nature.

And he was abroad, too.

Down from the North he galloped at the fore of a motley gang of masked men, who were thoroughly equipped as to weapons and horses, and were finished equestrians.

Down to the edge of the town they rode, and then drew rein at the wave of the hand of the young chief.

"Remain here," he said, dismounting, "and keep my horse. I will go on foot. If you hear three pistol-shots in succession, let loose my horse and follow him. He will bring you to me!"

"All right, chief. It shall be at your wish!" responded one who was evidently a lieutenant of Deadwood Dick's newly organized band.

"In case we are attacked, shall we stand our ground and fight, chief?"

"Ay! fight as you never fought before—fight to the bitter death!" Deadwood Dick replied, fiercely, and then he turned and strode away toward the town.

Entering through a sparsely settled street, he hurried along, a heavy cloak thrown around his shoulders, and the mask removed temporarily from his face so as not to attract suspicion, should he encounter any one abroad. Hurrying along, he soon entered another street, which was the one on which stood the Howell mansion.

And this evidently was his destination, for he paused before it, and looked up and down the street.

No one was in sight upon the highway, and the lights were all out in the dwellings in the immediate vicinity.

The Howell mansion looked as somber as though death instead of nocturnal repose, reigned inside.

"This is the place, and the business lies before me, although it is a ticklish piece to handle!" Deadwood Dick muttered. "The first important step is to gain access to the house, and the second is to find my new ward, without raising a racket."

Evidently resolved upon making the attempt, he ascended the steps and gently tried the door, but found it locked. This was no surprise, for the Far-Western people are in favor of locked doors, which is the safest plan to adopt.

Selecting from among a bunch of keys, several, he tried them, one after the other, and the last one was the one to turn the lock.

"So far so good!" he muttered, with a satisfied expression. "I should feel like a thief of the night to enter any man's house, thus, but I am now only in quest of that which was intrusted to my care and protection."

Removing his boots, he took them in his hand, and opening the door, he softly entered, and closed it behind him.

All was dark as Stygia, but remembering from his previous visit, the location of the stairs, he soon found them, and paused upon the steps to make his arrangements.

Before him he had a rather delicate job—that of finding Stella without alarming her, and getting her away from the mansion. It required all the stealth and caution of his nature to perform the act, without arousing the house.

Tying the boots to his back, he drew from beneath his cloak a dark-lantern and a revolver.

With these in hand, ready for use, he stole softly up the stairs, finally arriving upon the landing without having created so much noise as a cat.

Here there was a diversion of hallways, in several directions, and he knew not which to take to bring him to the sleeping apartment of Stella.

After some deliberation he finally concluded to pay each room a visit, and chloroform the inmates if necessary, for he had fetched along plenty of the liquid drug for that purpose.

Stealing along, he soon came to the door of a room which he rightly conjectured was the bed-chamber of the major and his wife, for loud snores came from the interior.

Gently trying the door, he found that it was unlocked. He glided into the room, and to the bedside. A sponge saturated with chloroform, and held over the noses of the sleepers, had the effect to put them into a state of quietude from which there could be no immediate waking.

"They're disposed of, and now I wonder if I

hadn't better leave them a visiting card, so that they may know I've been here!"

Drawing from an inside pocket a silver hand-stamp he pressed against their foreheads, and as a result came to relief the sign of the double cross in letters of crimson.

"Ha! ha! It will be many a day ere they can wash that stain from their skin, I'll wager!" the Prince of the Road muttered, as he turned from the room.

The next room he visited proved to be occupied by the speculator's son, and the next by a servant. Still not despairing, Deadwood Dick kept on, leaving his strange device upon the forehead of each chloroformed sleeper.

At last he came to a room that was locked, and on listening he found that it contained sleepers.

To unlock the door was but a short job, and with the stealth of a cat he crept into the apartment.

A lamp was burning upon a dressing bureau, and its light was sufficient for him to see by, without the use of his lantern.

The room was large, and richly furnished, and contained two beds, each of which was occupied—one by two young ladies, and the other by one.

The former Deadwood Dick concluded were the daughters of Major Howell, while the latter was the daughter of the dead miner of Dead Pine Tract.

Gliding to the bedside of the two sleepers, the ex-Prince of the Road applied the chloroformed sponge, but not the stamp containing his strange device.

When they were properly drugged, he turned toward the lone sleeper, but gave a start of surprise.

She had partly risen in bed, upon her elbow, and was gazing straight at him with her big blue accusing eyes. At first Deadwood Dick was confused, but he quickly regained his self-possession.

"Fear not, my lady!" he said, respectfully, but in a low tone. "It is not my intention to harm you, but rather, to rescue from your imprisonment here!"

"Who are you, sir?" the maiden demanded, sternly. "Why do you come here like a thief in the night, and to my bedchamber?"

"My name is Ned Harris, lady, and I come at the instigation of your father!"

"Ah! my father! they told me he was dead—dead! Oh! God help me!"

And tears sprang to the eyes of the maiden, and dropped upon her cheeks.

"Be calm, lady. Your father is indeed dead, but he appointed me your protector, until you can choose one that suits you better. Here is his will, which you may read. I will now retire to the hall, while you dress yourself for your departure."

"Must I go with you, then?"

"It is necessary that you should, lady, for your life even, is not safe here. Have you any objections to accompanying me?"

"Not oh! no! I am so glad to get away from here. Please retire, and I will soon be ready."

Deadwood Dick accordingly left the room, and closed the door behind him.

In the hall he waited until the door opened, and Stella glided out to him.

"I am ready, now, sir. I read the will, and am willing to go with you!"

"Very well, my lady. You shall not misplace whatever confidence you may put in me!" Deadwood Dick replied.

They softly descended to the street, and hurried away through the night, which was dark and foggy.

Nor did they pause until they came to where a line of grim, masked horsemen were waiting. Then it was that Stella Howell gave a start of alarm.

"Be not afraid, lady," Deadwood Dick said, to quiet her apprehensions. "These are my men, and they will offer you no harm."

"Your men, sir? I do not understand, quite?" Stella replied.

"I will explain more, as soon as we reach camp. Please mount my horse behind me. Falconer, will you be kind enough to assist her?"

The lieutenant bowed, and tendered the requisite assistance, after which the cavalcade galloped away.

Away to the Dead Pine Tract, and to the cabin which once was that of David Howell, but now belonged to the outlawed Deadwood Dick.

A great change had already been made upon the Tract, since the reign of its new owner. The cabin had been enlarged to a building of

several rooms, thereby supplying quarters for the band, and several cabins were going up near by. An engine house was being constructed near the mouth of the mine to furnish shelter for new machinery that was to take the place of the horse-power for hoisting, which had previously been employed.

To the cabin the cavalcade rode, and then dismounted, Deadwood Dick conducting Stella to a suite of rooms which he had furnished especially for her accommodation. Here he left her, with a few instructions, and then descending to the ground he gave some additional instructions to his men, after which he mounted his thoroughbred steed again, and dashed away into the black starless night, as wild and weird as the night itself in those lonely mountain regions.

"A bald-headed spider,
Walkin' wid a crutch,
G'wine ter get a-home, bymeby;
Old Kaiser's bull purp,
He war Dutch.
G'wine ter get a-home bymeby.
A three-legged 'possum,
Settin' on a bench,
G'wine ter get a-home, bymeby.
He fell in lub
Wid a nigger wench,
G'wine ter get a-home bymeby.
"An' it's g'wine ter get a-home,
G'wine ter get a-home—

"Whoop! Kerwhoop! three cheers fer Royal American Star Jangled Spaner! Three howls fer ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail—ther man that never told a lie! Beautiful Bill ferever."

And straight down through Chestnut street pranced the famous Leadville giant, Beautiful Bill on a *tear*, such as he seldom ever had experienced before.

Full up to the neck was the giant, with bad whisky, whose assimilation within his capacious stomach was beginning to tell on him, in more than one way.

His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was red and of the most brutal expression, while his legs were growing more unsteady each moment.

In either hand he grasped a cocked navy revolver, which he flourished around in a manner that was unpleasant to behold. And there was consequently a general dodging among the crowd that swarmed in the streets, for none were there who cared to become a target for the ruffian's bullets, half-crazed with drink though he was.

Still, they followed and watched him with a sort of curiosity, for well they knew that the giant was searching game, and that a row and a fight would be the result. And perhaps no town of its size in the whole West can "pan out" so big a crowd on so short a notice to witness a street brawl as the famed city of Leadville.

"Wahoo! wahoo!" the giant bellowed, cutting a pigeon-wing, and then turning a clumsy hand-spring in the middle of the street. "Hayr I am, ye durned galoots, ther Original Pet Elephant, right fresh from ther flock—ther hatless, bootless Apoller uv ther Colorados! Here I am, ther great model o' beauty—a conqueror—a king among fools. Hist!" and the ruffian crouched low and peered around him—"hist! I say. Wharfrom came thet zephyr that sed sum ongainly galoot was spilin' fer a fight—war actooly dyin' because he couldn't get a feller uv my social status ter measure muscle wi' him? Fer luv or money! thet's fair, now. Sum pilgrim who wants ter fight me fer luv or money, jest step forth—waltz right out heer, and try ter flumigate ther great Apoller o' the Colorados—ther Pet Elephantum o' ther Leadville trail. Beautiful Bill am I—a solid man, whose bank account ar' good fer half a millyun, any day. A king o' this benighted region, am I, and yet despite my gold, my honors an' my gray hairs, I can't get up a decent respectable dog-fight wi' no pilgrim. It's a shame—a cavortin' outrageous shame. Fer Lord's sake, sum o' you chicken-livered honey-combs cum out heer an' gouge one o' my eyes out—ram yer fist down my throat—spit terbaccy-juice in my off ear, or do sumthin' ter relieve ther monotony o' ther situation, or I shall spile fer want o' amusement or exercise. Bet five—ten—fifty—a hundred thousand dollars I can polish ther proboscis uv ary galoot like a meersham, in two wiggles uv a mule's tail in fly time!"

Strong was the tempting argument offered by the bullwhacker, but none were there among the crowd to bite at his bait. A terror was he to the town, this ruffianly character, and all were afraid of him, for he was a reckless cut-throat of the most brutal species, and had been

known to kill half a dozen men in a single brawl, and come out unhurt.

Poor encouragement was this for an ordinary mortal to battle with him.

And the giant knew that he was universally feared which made him doubly ugly and bothersome.

In the middle of the street he now stood, his hat gone and his feet bare, while his cotton shirt was torn into shreds—there in the street he stood, glaring around, in search of some victim upon whom to vent his desire for a fight, for "spillin'" for a fight he truly seemed to be.

Suddenly his eye gleamed with savage exultation, as he saw the little actress, Fanny Farron, sit a store on the right hand side of the street, and hurry along in the direction of the theatre where she was to play.

"Ker whoop! looker thar, will ye, pilgrims, an' fease yer optics on thet purty little piece o' caliker, goin' up ther street! Hain't she scrumptious, though, an' as purty as ary yearling pack-mule on ther trail! Make way thar, while I chase ther gaudy butterfly, an' sip ther hunny from her lips. A kiss I'll have, by all ther thunderin' catamounts, an' thar's nary a galoot 'cept ther Pet Elephant as can have a bite out o' my cake nuther. Kerwhoop! hayr goes fer a gennywine feast from thet leetle beehive!"

And away pranced the ruffian in pursuit of the actress, at the top of his speed, staggering from side to side like a rickety wagon, and all the while bellowing at the top of his voice.

Pretty Fanny Farron saw in one terrified glance that she was pursued, and turned to flee, but a hand touched her on the arm, and a cool voice said:

"Don't run, Miss Farron, but stand your ground, and I will teach this fellow the lesson he deserves."

Accordingly the actress did not run, but looked up to find a stranger standing near—a handsomely-dressed fellow, with the characteristic coolness in his carriage and face, of a thoroughbred sport. Stalwart was he, and handsomely proportioned, with a blonde head of hair, a blonde mustache, and luxuriant side-whiskers of a corresponding hue, while the color of his eyes was somewhat hidden behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses.

A jaunty Derby hat was perched upon his head; his coat, pants and vest were of spotless duck, the bottoms of his pants being carelessly thrust in the legs of a pair of spurred cavalry boots. A massive gold chain ornamented his vest front, and in one white jeweled hand he held a serviceable riding-whip of braided buckskin.

Up came the bullwhacker, his eyes agleam with triumph, and his thick lips smacking with an appreciative gusto for the feast he anticipated.

"Ho! ho! thet's right, my daisy!" he roared, seizing Fanny by the arm; "thet's her exchequer, my daisy! One sweet smack from them lips—"

He did not finish the sentence, for the Sport seized him by the throat, and with strength he did not appear to possess, hurled him back to the ground.

With a grunt Beautiful Bill came down heavily, and the revolvers he held in his hand went flying far over the heads of the crowd.

A moment the giant lay quivering upon the earth—then he scrambled to his feet with a ferocious growl, as if intent upon the instant annihilation of his assailant.

But, no sooner did he regain his feet than the dandy sport proceeded to lay the whip over his head, shoulders and back, rapidly, every stroke of the little instrument drawing blood to the surface of the giant's swarthy skin.

In vain did he lunge forward to get a hold upon the Sport, but blow after blow beat him back, while terrible howls of pain escaped his lips.

And the crowd cheered wildly!

CHAPTER V.

A DUEL IN THE STREET—DEADWOOD DICK AGAIN.

With a strong arm did the Sport ply the whip, and in a manner that every blow counted by raising a bloody streak where the last struck.

And in vain did Beautiful Bill seek to escape the little instrument of torture, and to get a hold upon his assailant. But it was one of the efforts impossible.

"Cuss ye! quit! quit!" he roared, in pain, as bleeding in fifty places or more, he dropped on one knee, unable longer to stand.

"When you apologize to that lady, I will let

you off!" the Sport said, coolly, as he continued to deliver his unmerciful blows with mechanical regularity.

"Yes! yes! I apologize! I apologize, fer insultin' ther leddy!" the giant bellowed, in actual agony. "Quit! quit, or ye'll kill me!"

"I should be doing the country a great service, if I were to end your miserable career!" the Sport said. "Get up now and see if you can behave yourself."

And ceasing his castigation, the blonde stranger stood with whip in hand, gazing coolly at the man he had so thoroughly cowed.

Beautiful Bill rose slowly to a standing position, and glared at the Sport, in a savage manner.

"Cuss ye!" he growled, his repulsive features working with rage, and wearing an expression of undying hatred—"cuss ye, I say. You got the best o' me in thet tussle, but I'm bound ter have satisfaction, an' don't ye fergit it. Beautiful Bill am I—ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail—ther handsum Appollo o' ther Colorados, an' thar's nary a galoot a-goin' ter climb me an' say he war my conqueror. No, sir-ee, nary a time, and you bet yer leetle ducats on't. D'ye heer, ye bandbox son of a swill-tub—d'ye heer, I say! Ye've got ter fight me—me, ther great roarin' three-horned Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail!"

"Fight!" the Sport said, smiling. "Why certainly. I shall be only too happy to accommodate you. Please to name your weapons, and I am ready."

Beautiful Bill stared.

And the crowd cheered!

Here was a man just to their liking.

Here was a man who was not afraid of the "Pet Elephant" of the Leadville trail.

The giant was taken aback, at the prompt acceptance of his challenge, for he had confidently expected that the cool stranger would back out.

"What's yer name?" he demanded. "I ginerally know who I fight with!"

"Oh! as to that, you may call me Pacific Pratt, for short!" the Sport replied, coolly.

"Come, if you want to constitute the active part of a first-class funeral, just name your tools, and square yourself, in shape. I've no time to spend in bandying words with a man of your beastly character!"

"Then ye shall get yer stummick full jest as soon as ye want it!" the giant growled. "Fer we ain't a-goin' ter settle thes yere leetle debate wi' no revolvers, ner wi' no toothpicks, but ar' a-goin' ter wage fist ag'in' smeller, an' smeller ag'in' fist, until one or t'other ar' satisfied!"

"Which suits me to a dot!" Pacific Pratt answered, as coolly as ever. "Couldn't have met my desires better if you'd 'a' tried. Get ready, sir, and you shall have the pleasure of testing the friendship of my knuckles in short order!"

"Kerwhoop! better git ready, yerself!" the giant roared, beginning to strip to the waist.

Better write up yer obituary ef ye ain't prepared it already, fer cert'in it is thet ye're goin' ter git beauchfully salivated by me, ther great roarin' Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail—ther Appollo o' ther Colorados!"

Not a reply deigned the Sport; he simply discarded his duck jacket, and rolled up the sleeves of his boiled shirt, which displayed as handsomely developed a pair of arms, as one could ask to see. Then he stood coolly awaiting the motions of the giant bullwhacker, who was stripping himself of his shirt.

Soon he was ready, and turned to face his opponent, with the glare of a wild beast in his bloodshot eyes.

A man of powerful frame was the giant, his bony, knotted breast and ponderous arms quite a curiosity, in their way. Few were there who would have dared to engage with this terror-producing bullwhacker as the Sport was about to do. Surely, said the crowd, Beautiful Bill would win, and the dandy Sport would go to the ground, a crushed and pummeled mass of humanity. How could it be otherwise, when the giant was twice as muscular as the Sport, to all appearances, and superior in weight by a full hundred pounds!

Forward surged the crowd to form a ring around the twain, but Pacific Pratt waved them back, authoritatively.

"Back! back!" he cried, sternly. "Leave the street open, and keep at a distance. You can see just as well, and will greatly accommodate me!"

This was enough. Willing were the crowd to oblige this sportive individual who had come down among them with "cheek" enough to tackle the Leadville giant, Beautiful Bill.

Among the crowd were several lookers-on,

who watched with more than ordinary interest, it seemed. They were Calamity Jane, Old Avalanche, and the variety actress, Fanny Farron, who stood near the Girl Sport, with an eager, excited look upon her face.

"Jest look at that Sport!" Calamity said, addressing the Annihilator; "ain't he scrumptious—ain't he a regular daisy? An' ten to one he'll wax wigwags right out o' thet big blunderbus uv a giant."

"Great ham-bone, yes. He's a fine lukin' bird, C'lamity, but then ye know fine feathers make fine birds, all except buzzards."

"Do you not know who that Sport is?" Fanny Farron asked, venturing to address Calamity.

"I heerd him give his pronoun as Pacific Pratt!" the Girl Sport replied, coolly, for she cared not to make friends with this actress, whose voice was as musical as the trill of a bird, and whose face and form were attractive to the eye. To Calamity, her presence suggested a thought of snakes!

Fanny Farron, if aware of Calamity's aversion of tone, did not choose to notice it, for she chattered on glibly:

"Pacific Pratt, eh? Ha! ha! I think I know better than that. I knew the fellow the moment he offered to encounter the giant for me."

"You did?" Calamity said, indifferently.

"I did!" Miss Farron assured. "I wonder that you have not already recognized him?"

"I? How?" and the Girl Sport gazed more keenly at the actress, and then at Pacific Pratt.

"What do you mean?"

"I cannot explain. If you were sharp at guessing, you needn't ask?" was the reply, and then the little queen of the variety stage, turned to watch the combat. No disgrace was there in this, apparently, for other women had paused in passing along—and some of them were Leadville's aristocrats—to watch the contest of skill and strength.

Of course there was betting on every hand, and among the supporters of Beautiful Bill, Alf Howell, the gambler, was prominent and conspicuous.

"A thousand dollars, here, to bet that Beautiful Bill punches the bandbox galoot clean out of time, and sweeps the street with him!" roared the ugly son of the speculator, as he elbowed his way about through the crowd. "A hull thousan' ter bet thet ther bullwhacker is ther winner! Who takes it?"

"I reckon I'll take you!" Calamity Jane said, promptly, producing a wallet that was well filled. "I'm the very customer to grapple such bets as that."

"You?" Alf Howell ejaculated in amazement. "Why, as I live, it's a girl in breeches. Say, leetle one, hedn't you better run home to your ma?"

"I think not. I'd rather bet with you, and win. Come! put up or shut up. Avalanche here will hold the stakes for us, I reckon!"

"And I'll see fair play!" Fanny Farron said, drawing and cocking a revolver, and stepping nearer. "Avalanche must give the stakes to which ever wins."

"Who told you to mix your lip in this conclave?" Alf Howell demanded, savagely. "You better mind your business, or I'll be the death of you!"

"I ain't afraid of it. You go on and plank your cash, or I'll put a pain through you so quick, you'll believe you ar' electrified."

Howell deposited, with a savage growl. He had had a notion to back out of the bet, but this unexpected movement on the part of the actress had made it necessary for him to proceed as he had commenced.

Calamity also deposited her wager, in the hands of Old Avalanche, and then turned to note the result of the fight, which had now begun.

Yes, the Sport and the giant had confronted each other, with bared arms and clenched fists, and were sparring—the Sport scientifically, while the giant succeeded only clumsily.

Too ponderous was he to be spry, and the Sport warded off his wild lunges, with the greatest of ease, while he occasionally put in a "tester" upon the giant's face, with staggering effect, eliciting a cheer from the crowd.

No novice was this Pacific Pratt, evidently, if he was a sport. His every movement was graceful and quick, his blows were surely planted, and he was never for an instant off his guard, while his eye coolly met that of the giant, without flinching, behind the gold-rim glasses.

In vain did the Pet Elephant of the Leadville trail endeavor to grapple with his opponent, in order to crush him in a bear-like hug, but each

lunge was coolly met, and the giant driven back, beneath the shower of blows precisely directed.

It soon became evident to the crowd that Pacific Pratt was a pugilist extraordinary, and that he was merely playing with the giant, and worrying him to a greater rage, for the Sport did not appear to use much exertion to keep him off, and a smile constantly lingered beneath his blonde mustache.

Whatever was his intention, he was each moment succeeding in arousing Beautiful Bill to a greater pitch of fury, the culminating point of which did not seem to be reached—not until the ruffian was stretched out, insensible upon the ground. Boiling with terrible rage did he seem to be.

"Great ham-bone that hed ther pugilistic encounter with old Joner!" roared the familiar voice of the Annihilator, "jest luk at thet Sport polish off ther proboscis uv thet bullwhacker. Lordy! I wouldn't be in Beauchiful Bill's place fer a mint o' money. Oh! magoozzlem Marier! Old Mose w'at cavorted thru ther scriptural bull-rushes. See ther Pacific cuss punch et to him! Hooray! bet my old head ag'in a drink o' tarantler thet William goes ter grass, less'n a thousand wiggles o' a lamb's tail. Thet ar' beauchiful fistcular demonstration o' ther Sport yander, but et don't hold a sarcumstance ter w'at I've seen. Fer instance thar war my old Billy goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale—a famuss anamile war thet same Florence, you bet. She'd jest poise her head, wiggle her stub, and pitch inter a battle hot an' heavy, would she. Hev actooly known her ter lay out her level score o' Injuns in a day, an' then gambol away ter court up ther Widder Briggses pet cat—an' et warn't much o' a day fer Injuns, nuther. Then thar war my old mare, Prudence Cordeliar w'at I s'pect is now ornamented w' wings, an' be a-sailin' around among the saintly cherubims up in boss heaven. She war a great mare, war Prudence—know'd more'n one minute than an ordinary boss knows all his life. Fact, by gracious! Hev actooly known thet hoser stretch out her hind huff so quick thet a shoe'd glide off an' skip around ag'in ther skull o' ther 'tarnal red heathen, until et salivated an' give ther death grip ter more ner a dozen. An' yet thet ain't a sarcumstance dun up in a brown rag, ter what ther Annihilation used ter do when all tergether, an' I tell ye w'at ther men ain't so brave as they used ter be, tho' thet Pacific Pratt ar' an exception ter ther rule."

"Ha! just look at that!" Calamity said, excitedly. "If that wasn't a beauty, I don't want a cent!"

For the Sport had dealt the giant a tremendous "stem-winder," upon the nose, which seemed to completely flatten that member to the ruffian's face. Nor, now that he had seemingly got his hand in, did the Sport stop, for one blow after another did he deposit on the same spot in rapid succession, in the meantime coolly warding off the giant's lunges. Spat! spat! spat, and the nose of Beautiful Bill grew flatter than ever, while bellows of pain escaped his lips, and his face was bathed in oozing blood.

At last came the climax.

The Sport dealt the giant a terrible blow upon the forehead—a left-handed one, at that.

Down went the bullwhacker upon the ground, insensible and quivering; while, seizing his hat, coat and whip, Pacific Pratt hurriedly strode away.

The crowd stared and wondered.

What was the cause of this strange action, on the part of the Sport? Was he afraid to wait until Beautiful Bill should have returned to consciousness?

This would not seem possible, and he such a master of arms. Yet, go he did, and soon disappeared among the crowd, far down the street.

Then it was that all eyes were considerably turned upon Beautiful Bill, who was leisurely measuring his length in the dusty street, unconscious that his valor as the boss of Leadville's electric city was a thing of the past.

And when all eyes rested upon him there came a unanimous ejaculation of surprise, resulting upon a discovery, and that discovery was that upon the forehead of the giant were strange, bloody gashes of crimson, formed in the shape of the double cross!

This much was seen, then the words:

"Deadwood Dick's device!" passed from lip to lip.

All eyes turned intuitively in the direction Pacific Pratt had gone, but he was nowhere in sight. His haste to depart was now explained.

Cleverly disguised as the Sport, Deadwood Dick had been among them, and had gone again, leaving behind him his terrible device.

Excitement for a while raged intense, but

subdued when it was ascertained that the Road Prince had made good his escape from the town.

"The money is mine!" Calamity Jane said, with a chuckle, "and you, Mr. Alf Howell, will learn to bet next time on the winning card."

The gambler uttered an oath of rage.

"The money was not fairly won!" he growled, allowing his hand to drop below his belt, "an' I'll be cussed ef ye shall have it!"

"Look out! Don't draw weapons around here!" Fanny Farron cried, sharply, "or I'll let you have the contents of this, unreservedly!" And she held her pistol on a level with his heart. "Get out, now, before I accidentally pull the trigger!"

With a frightful malediction, the speculator's son obeyed, and the actress followed him until she came to a cross-street, when she set out for her hotel.

Calamity Jane then received the result of her bet from the Annihilator, and they separated, each taking a different course, the Girl Sport going to her boarding-place.

After leaving the scene of the fight, the Sport, Pacific Pratt hurried north through Chestnut street and out of the town. Soon he came to a chaparral or thicket of evergreen oaks, from which he led a handsome coal-black horse, and mounted. He then rode rapidly away, and in due time entered the Dead Pine Tract.

Riding to the door of the large cabin, he dismounted, and giving the horse into charge of the Chinaman, he entered, and ascended the stairs to the second floor.

In passing the door of Stella Howard's room he glanced into the room, to find her engaged at a book, several choice volumes having by his forethought been prepared for her entertainment.

"So I find you pleasantly occupied, eh?" he said, smiling. "I am glad that you find something to kill time."

"I am not hard to please," Stella replied, glancing up, a pleased look in her eyes. "I generally find some mode of killing time."

"Which is fortunate. I often wish that I had not been born of a restless and roving disposition. I was afraid you might find it dull and lonely here."

"Oh! no, indeed! Dead Pine Tract has been my home so long that I like it here. Only it seems lonely without papa."

And tears rose in the eyes of the beautiful maiden, for beautiful she was—petite but well-rounded of form, with a fair, prettily chiseled face, a sweet mouth, and expressive blue eyes, that had the power of being sparkling in mirth, and handsome in sorrow; while soft luxuriant masses of chestnut hair fell over her pretty shoulders. No ravishing beauty was this ward of Deadwood Dick's, but a simply quiet and dignified beauty, whom it was easy for one to admire and love.

"True, you must miss your parent, my dear lady, but I shall try to make my espionage of yourself pleasant, and render you cheerfully content," Dick said, respectfully. "And when you are in need of anything, or some one to converse with, you have to send to me to insure instant attention."

"Thank you," Stella answered. "As my protector, I shall of course consider you my friend, and shall, as such, not be backward in making known my needs."

Then Deadwood Dick went on to his own rooms, where he threw himself down upon the parlor sofa to rest.

But, ere he was permitted to greet Morpheus, one of the men entered, and handed him a card.

Upon this, neatly engraven, was the name: "MISS FANNY FARRON."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ACTRESS PROPOSES—BEAUTIFUL BILL'S CHANGE.

"MISS FANNY FARRON," Dick echoed in amazement, as he saw the inscription on the card. "What in the world can bring her here? How did she get past the pickets, Cotterly?"

"I know not, your honor. I met her wandering about, near the stronghold, and she requested me to fetch this card," the road-agent replied.

"Very well. Since she has taken the pains to come here, show her in, and I will see what she wants. Give the lieutenant my orders that he allow no person to hereafter pass the lines without giving the countersign. This is imperative."

The aid bowed, and departed, to show in the little actress from the Leadville Coliseum. Ere she came, Deadwood Dick hurriedly removed

the blonde hair and beard that had given him character as the Sport, and stored them in his closet, while, smooth-faced and as handsome as ever, he awaited the coming of Miss Farron.

She was shown in directly, and advanced toward him with outstretched hand, her face assuming one of the archly bewitching smiles she had been taught to master, as a part of the secret of her stage success.

"Oh! Mr. Harris, I am so glad I have found you at last!" she gasped, as if out of breath.

"Having heard that this was your home, I ventured to come right on, as soon as your duel was over with the bullwhacker, to thank you for protecting me from public insult."

"I ask no thanks, lady," Deadwood Dick replied, a trifle severe; "in fact, I ask no odds of anybody. It was a pleasure to assist a lady in distress, but that was all, and you need feel under no obligations to me."

"Yet I do," the actress replied, warmly, crossing suddenly over and dropping upon her knees in front of him—"I do owe you a deeper debt of gratitude, than I can ever repay you, unless you will accept the boundless wealth of affection I offer you, and make me your wife. Do not start, or be surprised, Mr. Harris, for this is no spontaneous outburst from an impulsive imagination, but a strong, faithful love on my part for you, which sprung to life when I first met you. I know it is not the customary thing for us women to do the wooing, but I am a strange girl, they say, in more than one way, and one of my peculiarities is, that I do not believe in ceremony. Free thoughts, and laws of etiquette to suit myself, are the golden rules I shall continue to abide by!"

"But, my dear Miss Farron, you do wrong in loving such a man as I, if you do, as you say!" Deadwood Dick replied, in great surprise. "I certainly have no affection for you of the kind you mention—indeed, as a total stranger, almost, I have never given you the second thought."

"That don't make any difference. Let me stay here at the stronghold a week, and if you do not love me enough to marry me, I'll go away again."

"Impossible, Miss Farron. I am not desirous of trying any love experiments, just now. Did I care to marry, I should prefer to select my wife, and to do the courting. One faithless wife has not left behind her in my heart a desire to risk another."

"Then, you refuse to listen to me—refuse even to let me remain here until I can win your affection?" the beautiful actress cried, rising to her feet, her face red with anger and mortification at her defeat.

"Yes, Miss Farron; I must, for my own sake, and for your sake. It would not be the proper thing for you to remain here, even were I inclined to listen to your plea, which I am not, I am sorry, for your sake, to say."

"Bah! You dare to keep another girl here, and see no impropriety in that!"

"Miss Howell is my ward, lady, or she would not be here. She was left in my charge by the will of her father, and I am responsible as her guardian."

Miss Fanny Farron bit her lip in vexation. Such a crushing defeat to her matured plans she had not dreamed of, and consequently she keenly felt the cut of the refusal.

"Very well. If you will not let me remain here, I will go back to Leadville, Mr. Ned Harris, but I go not as I came, your warm friend. A broken heart I shall carry with me—a heart that is rankling with hatred toward you. Look out for me, for I shall stab you unawares, even though it may not be soon. I shall watch until I see an opportunity to torture you, then I shall apply myself to the task!"

"But, why this anger, Miss Farron?" Deadwood Dick asked, earnestly. "I see no need for it. If you love me, your love can not be a true one, to canker so soon with enmity."

"You shall see!" the actress replied, almost savagely. "I am alone in the world, I know, but not entirely friendless."

Then she turned abruptly and quitted the room.

After she was gone, Deadwood Dick sat musing upon the strange occurrence, his brows knotted perplexedly.

"Calamity Jane was right," he muttered, "when she said that the actress was a devil, or words to that effect. I would not believe then that a creature so fair of face and artless of manner could be the possessor of such a fiery temper. But, such is life. I wonder if my ward will turn out the same? No! I will not believe that, even should Calamity tell me so—Calamity whose perception is as keen as the edge of a razor. A few years ago, up near

Deadwood, I asked her to become my wife and—she refused. I wonder if she would do it now? She seems to hover around wherever I go, a sort of guardian angel—though some would laugh were they to hear me call her an angel. A wild, strange character she is—virtuous, and true as steel, beyond peradventure, yet so wild and strange as to seem a part of the wilderness through which she roams. Has she a heart? If so, it is buried deep under a cloud of past obscurity. And Stella Howell—I almost fancy that I care for her, as a husband should care for his bride.”

The day after the street fight between Beautiful Bill and the Sport, Pacific Pratt, Major Howell left his mansion and rode out of town, down into the classic shades of timbered Stray Horse Gulch. He was not dressed with his customary neatness, and a handkerchief tied across his forehead gave him the appearance of having been on a drunk, and he had bandaged his head to keep off the headache.

But such was not the case. The speculator wore the cloth to hide the terrible sign of the double cross, which Deadwood Dick had stamped on his forehead. In vain had he attempted to wash and scrub off the stain, but it proved indelibly planted in the very flesh, and the more he washed it the more distinct became the marks. So, rather than to appear a marked man, he had done the next best thing—covered the strange device from sight.

In no pleasant mood was the major, evidently, this morning, for there was a savage expression about his mouth, and a gleam in his eye that boded evil for some one.

Who that one was, we shall soon learn.

Guiding his horse through the wild canyon-trail, at a rapid pace, he at last came to a glade or opening among the pines.

In this stood a sort of tumble-down hut, constructed of logs and stones, and having but one door and no windows. It was a desolate-looking place, at the best, with rank weeds and briars growing up around it, which showed that the tenant was in no way inclined to agricultural pursuits, or husbandry. Over the door upon a planed board, was the rather startling if not unique inscription,

“BEAUTIFUL BILL,
“PROFESSIONAL CUTTHROAT.”

“This must be the place!” the major muttered, reading the sign, with a grim smile. “The fellow is no sneak of a rascal, anyhow, for he boldly advertises his business. I wonder if he is at home?”

Dismounting before the rough door, he knocked upon it, sharply, and then listened. Several minutes elapsed; then there were steps, the door opened, and Beautiful Bill stood upon the threshold.

No longer could he justly be classed among men of beauty, however, for his appearance was quite the reverse.

His forehead bore the sign of the double cross, and his nose was all smashed out of shape, the wreck being ornamented by a huge plaster.

These features, in addition to his naturally ugly physique, gave him an appearance at once frightful and disgusting.

A growl escaped his still swollen lips as he saw the major. Evident it was that the Pet Elephant was in no mood to receive visitors.

“Waal, what d’ye want?” he grunted, suspiciously.

“I want to see you on business,” the major said. “Let me come in, and we’ll have a glass of Kentucky from my private bottle, and I will explain the nature of my errand.”

“Waal, I s’pose ye can come,” the giant growled, opening the door, “tho’ this ain’t my day fer receivin’ visitors. Got my nose smashed last night, ye see, an’ am sorter in mournin’.”

“Yes, I know. I witnessed your fight with Deadwood Dick. I marvel you did not do for him.”

Beautiful Bill chuckled, audibly.

“I was a fool—that’s how I got salivated!” he said, feeling dolefully of the plaster on his nose. “I might ‘a’ knowed I’d get blistered. Deadwood Dick never met ther galoot thet ked lick him, nohow ye ken fix it.”

“What! do you, with all your brag, acknowledge that the road-agent can lick you?”

“I do—I acknowledged the corn, long ere this. Didn’t he cook my goose—didn’t he lambaste me for all I was worth, now? You’d be willin’ ter swar that ye seed him do it, and so would the crowd, while as fer me, ther great Pet Elephant o’ ther Leadville trail, I acknowledge ther corn. I ain’t no Christyun, by a long shot, nur no leetle George Washington wi’ a

hatchet, but I do reckon et’s my privelege ter tell when I got fairly licked!”

“Well—well, admitting that through some weakness and indisposition on your part, the Sport did whip you—he couldn’t do it again, in all probability; perhaps—”

“Whoa up thar! I jest don’t keer fer him ter try. I ain’t no hog, and know when I’ve got enough. Jest luk at this nose, will ye? Et licks as ef it hed been thru a base-ball season in Chicago; then cast yer optics at my pretty forehead, and note what a beautiful motto is engraved thar. Fight ag’in wi’ Deadwood Dick? No, sir-ee, bob-tail hoss! You don’t ketch ther Pet Elephant gittin’ used up ag’in, like he war yesterday. Thet Deadwood Dick’s a leetle volcanner, pilgrim, an’ ef ye ain’t purtic’lar about attendin’ yer own funeral, ye’d better steer shy o’ his nibses, an’ don’t ye fergit it!”

“He served you rough, Bill,” the major said, consolingly, “and I don’t blame you for not wanting to tackle him alone. Here, take a suck from my bottle, and it will stiffen up your spirits. Now, you of course meditate revenge on this devilish road-agent, Bill?”

“Revenge!” the Pet Elephant said, seizing the major’s half-pint flask, and eying it grimly, after which he raised it to his lips and drained it in a couple of long, strong pulls. “Revenge, did yessay? Waal, I opine no, pilgrim. A wonderful change hes come over me, since thet galoot smashed my nose beyond all its resemblance ter Appoller—a wonderful change. I tell ye he jest knocked ther fight all c’lar outen me, an’ I’ve resolved ter haul in my sign out thar, an’ shut up shop. When sech fellars as Deadwood Dick ar’ about, I opine Pet Elephants don’t quite sagaciate in this climate.

“Ye see thet book, yander! Waal, thet’s a Bible, w’at I bought fer three set-em-ups, up in town, an’ I’m goin’ ter study thet til I can preach a fair shake o’ a sermon, an’ b’ild me a church, hyar in Leadville, whar I can convert sech sinners as I have been. Oh! you bet yer boots I’ll make religyyn hum!”

“Then you positively refuse to revenge yourself upon Deadwood Dick, for the ill he has done you?” the major demanded, rising, with regret in his tone—for he had made calculation upon enlisting Beautiful Bill in his service.

“I positively refuse!” Beautiful Bill returned. “When I have a desire to ram myself ag’in an’ arthquake, next time, I’ll s’arch fer one o’ different register, an’ don’t ye fergit et. As fer thet Deadwood Dick, I admire him, I do, from ther soles o’ my stogy boots. Any leetle cuss like him who can stand up an’ lick ther great Pet Elephant o’ ther Leadville trail, fust wi’ a gad an’ then wi’ knuckles, deserves a seat in ther presidential cheer. Why, he did lambaste me beautiful, an’ did a fust-class job, or I shed never hev fergiv’ him. Thar’s stripes on my back like on a hyena or a zebra, and, swaller me fer a watermelon, ef I ain’t proud uv ‘em!”

“You are a consummate ass!” the major growled. “Any man but an idiot would seek revenge. See! I too have the sign of the double cross stamped upon my forehead, but Deadwood Dick shall pay dearly for his cursed work, mark my word for that. I have a hundred men who will follow me to his retreat, and help to kill him and his gang!”

“Planets of Venus and Jupiter! Ef ye don’t git ther wu’t licked you ever war, I’m a sucker, that’s all!” the giant replied, as the major took his departure. “When ye git ther beauty o’ yer proboscis altered inter a pig’s-fut jelly, jest cum erround, an’ I’ll shake hands wi’ ye.”

The major rode away with a curse upon his lips, while Beautiful Bill re-entered his hut, thoughtfully, and donned his belt of weapons. There was a peculiar twinkle in his bloodshot eye, not often there, and an expression about his mouth that was inexpressibly ludicrous.

“I’ll bet ther major git’s lambasted like thunder—that is, if Beautiful Bill knows his P’s and Q’s,” he mused.

Arming himself to his satisfaction, he sat down to a table, and wrote with pen and ink, the following message, in a clear, legible, and stylish hand, which bespoke that some time in the past he had been the recipient of education in penmanship, at least, wh ch was more than could be said of half the ruffians of his ilk who infested the mines.

“LEADVILLE, MAY—, 187—.

“MR. DEADWOOD DICK:

“I allow ye’ll be sum’at surprised when ye git this, but ye can bet yer boots it’s all on ther squar. Since ye licked me, I don’t cherish fer ye no enmity, nary a time, an’ ef ye run fer president alongside o’ Grant or any other galoot, hayr’s w’at’ll vote fer ye, an’ don’t ye fergit it. But this ain’t w’at I write this pistol fer ter remark. This morning ther pilgrim,

Major Howell, cum ter me, an’ wanted ter draft me inter a campaign ag’in ye, but I wouldn’t go. He sed as how he war a-goin ter lay fer ye, wi’ a hundred men, an’ lick out yer hull crew. I allowed ther him thet he couldn’t tesh one side o’ you, an’ I’ll allow I orter know. So I tho’t I’d write an’ warn ye ter luk out fer ther major. Ef ye want any help, don’t be afeard ter call on yours truly. Ye did a fair job by me, an’ I luv ye fer it, an’ tharfore, wi’ a smashed nose, an’ a cross-marked forehead, I remain,

“Lovingly yours,

“BEAUTIFUL BILL.

“P. S. I cave. You’re entitled ter boss ther town, an’ I’ll take er back seat. I ain’t no swine, an’ know when I’ve got enough. B. B.”

With this document safely stored in his pocket, the giant then left the hut, and trudged toward Leadville.

The very first man he met in front of the Tontine restaurant, was the famous Annihilator, Old Avalanche, and up to him the Pet Elephant pranced, forthwith.

“Looker hyar,” he said, in a tragic whisper, “be you a friend ther thet daisy, Deadwood Dick?”

“Great ham-bone! yes,” Avalanche replied; “but what of et?”

“Waal, just lend me yer ear. I’m a friend o’ the leetle cuss, too, since he lambasted me, down hyar in ther street, an’ I want htm ter get this ye’re docyment.”

Avalanche received the message from the giant, and read it, a puzzled expression coming upon his grizzled features.

“Great aristocratic ham-bone! did ye write this, William?” he demanded, suspiciously eying the giant.

“I did, an’ don’t ye fergit it,” the Pet Elephant replied, proudly. “I am a changed man, now, pilgrim, an’ ef ye don’t find et out, I’m a jack-mule. A Christyun am I, Beautiful Bill, clean from the soles of my stogy boots, ter my sky parlor!”

CHAPTER VII.

A RETURNED MOTHER—AT DEAD PINE TRACT.

THE first person Fanny Farron met after her return to Leadville, from Deadwood Dick’s village, was Jacques Frouch, the actor at the Coliseum.

He was lounging upon the grass at the edge of the town—had evidently been watching for her coming—and rose to his feet as she came along.

The expression upon her face told very well of the defeat of her plans, and a gleam of satisfaction was in his eyes as he saw it.

“Ze ma belle Fanny did not meet with ze success she expected?” he said, with his sarcastic broken French, which he knew annoyed her. “She did not find ze road-agent of ze same opinion of herself, eh?”

“No, curse him!” the actress hissed, between her white teeth, her eyes flashing venomously, “he refused me, and now he shall feel my vengeance. I’ll fight him and kill that girl he has taken to protect, before I leave Leadville.”

Frouch smiled serenely.

“Your spirit is admirable, my lady,” he said, with a sort of triumphant chuckle. “Your acting comes to you natural. But, I fear you will have a serious task, combating against a man so powerful and shrewd as the notorious road-agent, Deadwood Dick. He is bad medicine.”

“I do not intend to work alone,” was the reply. “You must help me, Jack—you who have the will and the ingenuity of a devil in your heart.”

“I, my lady? Why should I mix up in your lover’s quarrels, pray?”

“Because I want you to. You once told me you had learned the drug and chemist trade in France, and could compound a slow lingering poison, which would cause the patient the most excruciating agony, and at the same time refuse to be ameliorated by any counter drug. Now, this is the very article I want administered to that doll-faced ward of Deadwood Dick’s, and you must do the job!”

Jacques Frouch shuddered a little, the cynical smile on his face dying out.

“I am surprised at you,” he said, after a moment’s survey of her. “That is a terrible way of getting rid of an enemy.”

“A sure way, however,” the actress replied, coolly. “You must do the job.”

“Not by a big sight!” the Frenchman said. “I ain’t in that business.”

“Then, if you refuse, your hopes of ever winning me are blasted.”

“Bah! have they not always been blasted? Have you not always refused me?”

“Yes, but if you will serve me in this way, I’ll reward you, and promise to become yours.”

Jacques Frouch's eyes sparkled greedily. "Are you lying to me?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"No, upon my honor. If you will bring me proof of the death of Deadwood Dick's ward, you can send for a minister as soon as you choose thereafter."

"Very well. You can depend upon me, and if you back out, you shall die by the same agency as your victim!" he said, significantly. "But, this is not what brought me here. I was sent for you."

"Sent for me? Whom by, pray?"

"That I am unable to tell, more than that the party was a woman, and deeply veiled, at that. She came to me, and desired that I should fetch you."

"Strange; I know of no woman here, who could possibly be interested in me."

"She is, all the same, judging by what she said to me. Will you come?"

"Of course. I'm curious to see a veiled woman."

Together they hurried down Harrison avenue, to the Clarendon Hotel, which they entered and ascended to the general parlor on the second floor.

A woman clad in a dark robe, and with her face deeply veiled, arose as they entered, and advanced a step—then paused, half-hesitatingly in the middle of the floor.

"Are you Miss Farron, the songstress?" she demanded, something of eagerness in her tone.

"I am the same," the actress replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I have an interest in you!" the woman said, sinking into a chair. "Be seated, pray, and we will talk. In the first place, what are the first recollections in your early life—that is, how far back can you remember?"

"Not very far," was the reply, and the actress exchanged glances with Jacques Frouch, who had seated himself near the door. "My first recollections are of the stage, on which I sung when I was but ten years old."

"Were you alone—do you remember the party who had you in charge?"

"I remember her very indistinctly: a woman who drank poor whisky to excess, and who beat me around unmercifully."

"What became of this guardian of yours?"

"I don't know. She called herself my mother, but then, I never counted on that, and was glad when she skipped out. They told me she'd slid for stealing some money from one of the actors."

"What became of you, after this woman left you?"

"Well I shook for myself, and took care of myself, an' here you see me."

"Yes, and glad I am, too, for I believe you are not that scrupulous that you would refuse to earn a pile of money in an easy way."

"As to that you may have read me pretty correct!" Miss Farron replied, with a laugh. "I certainly should not hesitate to pick up money and examine it, if I saw it lying in my path."

The veiled woman laughed, too, in a peculiar, rasping way.

Evident it was that she had secretly studied the actress, and laid her plans accordingly, previous to the visit.

"It is as I thought then. For money you are willing to work. All right. Do you know what your real name is—your real name?"

"No, unless it is Farron."

"Then let me tell you. Your name is *Howell*. You're the first and only legitimate daughter of Major Howell, the speculator of this place!"

"I Major Howell's daughter?" the actress cried, in amazement. "And you—who are you, woman?"

"I am your mother!"

"This is incredible, madam. Are you the same woman who was my guardian in the past?"

"The same. I would bare my face to you, but for reasons all-sufficient to myself. I left you, years ago in order to hunt up this villain who married and deserted me, and now I have found him, married again, with a family grown up around him, and well to do."

"Well, what do you propose to do?" the actress demanded, in a business-like manner. "If you've any plan to make some money for me, speak out; if not, *git*!"

"I have a plan," the veiled woman replied, without appearing to notice the coarse suggestion of the other, "and you being my child, shall share equally with me, if you lend me such aid as I desire. Major Howell will pay high to have us lay back and not expose him as a bigamist."

"True. You have got him where the hair is long, sure enough. Well, count me in, and let's

go to work. I want money. I spent all of my last month's salary at the Coliseum, and am dead broke. Haven't even got a copper."

"Be not in a hurry, or you will spoil all," the veiled woman replied. "I will prepare the way first, and then wait on you again."

Then, after a few other words, she took her departure.

The sign of the double cross!

During the succeeding week, this was the subject uppermost in the minds of the people—the topic of general conversation, in Leadville and its tributary mining cities.

For, every day was Deadwood Dick's strange device being found, either upon the living or the dead, through the mountain gulches and in the mining villages adjacent to the carbonate region, in and around Leadville.

"The Double Cross!" was upon every lip, and the mention of it was a synonym of terror, for it meant the vengeance of the Prince of the Road—the notorious Deadwood Dick, who had hanged once to secure his freedom, and having failed to get it at the hands of the people, was causing a reign of terror and death that had never before been equaled. In justice to himself, said some, was this daring outlaw fighting, but the masses failed to view the matter in that light.

Through the shadows of early evening, two men left the town of Leadville, on foot, and made their way toward the north. Upon the outskirts they were joined by a band of four-score or more of mounted, armed men, who also held two empty saddle-horses in waiting.

These were soon filled, however, by the two parties first mentioned, and then the whole cavalcade galloped toward the north.

For some time they traveled on; then, as the moon hove in sight from below the horizon, they drew rein, at a wave of the leader's hand, he being no other person than Alf Howell, the speculator's son, and the man beside him was the major in person.

What was the meaning of this midnight expedition? Why all these armed men on horseback, venturing into the wilderness—men whose rough, slouchy dresses, and still rougher physiques, pronounced them to be of the most ruffianly classes?

There could be but one supposition—that they were going to a conflict.

As they came to a halt, Alf Howell said:

"Order, now! Are all the boys here?"

"All here," replied one of the men.

"Eighty-four, in all?"

"Ay! Eighty-four, in all."

"Good. Is every man properly armed, and ammunition?"

"Ay! I've seen to that."

"Good, again. All dismount, now, and secure your horses, hereabouts. Before us lies the Dead Pine Tract, which is our destination."

The order was rapidly obeyed, with as little noise as possible. When every man had tethered his horse, and assembled in the little glade where they had halted, Alf Howell, or Dandy Alf as he was more familiarly known, said:

"If you are all ready now, we will divide into four companies of twenty-one men apiece, and separate. McNulty, you can take charge of one brigade and station yourself at the northern edge of the Tract, throwing out sentinels every little ways to prevent any one from escaping from the Tract. Shoot any one attempting such a thing. Deems you may do the same on the eastern side with the second division, and Brocton can take the west end, ditto. I will remain with my division here on the southern side. Let no man pass you or go in or out of the Tract, unless he gives you the password."

"What is the password?" asked McNulty. "I have forgotten, if you told me."

"It is *'Sdeath*!" the gambler replied, grimly. "Now divide up, and get off to your posts, where you will remain until you hear the blast of a horn. Then make for the big cabin in the glade. If you are attacked before, however, blow your trumpets, and hold strong until we arrive. I haven't made all my plans yet, and can't give you further directions. Score off, now, and get to your posts!"

This order was speedily obeyed.

The three officers, McNulty, Deems and Brocton selected their twenty-one each and departed into the depths of the forest.

Dandy Alf then strung part of his men along the southern side of the Tract, wherein was located the new village of the daring outlaw, Deadwood Dick, placing them at regular intervals, and reserving the other portion in case of emergency.

When this was arranged to his satisfaction, he turned to the major, who was disguised and masked.

"Now, the next move is to get into the outlaw's camp, and procure the girl," he said, savagely. "She is likely to give us more trouble than the whole gang of road-agents."

"Not if you manage it right. Gag her when you catch her, and you can easily bring her away."

"But, how am I to get to the stronghold when they have doubtless got pickets outposted, to intercept new-comers?"

"That is a question we must devise a plan to answer. By our united brains we ought surely to overpower an obstacle of that nature, without much trouble. Thought is a great invention you know!"

Then the father and son engaged in a whispered conversation, which was not audible to a listener. For there was such a listener, as was observable had human eyes penetrated a clump of undergrowth not far from where the two Howells stood.

A bulky mass of individuality was curled up in these bushes, and had been, ever since the arrival of the band. It now began to cautiously uncoil, however, and finally disclosed the ponderous Leadville giant, Beautiful Bill. The Pet Elephant it was, sure enough, and, having heard all that he was able to hear for the time being, he began to cast about him for escape.

No clumsy hulk was the giant, evidently, when he chose to exercise caution, for he wormed his way out of his place of concealment and into the glade right past the sentinels, without being discovered, a quiet grin the while upon his battered features.

Straight toward the cabin rendezvous of Deadwood Dick he made his way, often having to lie flat upon his stomach, to avoid exposing his person to the bullets of any pickets who might be gazing toward him.

In this way he finally gained the cover of the great cabin; then in its entrance he came face to face with—Deadwood Dick.

"Shoo! don't make a noise!" the giant cautioned, as Dick stepped back in surprise, and laid his right hand upon a pistol butt. "I ain't no spook, ner no supernatural visitation, you bet, but Beautiful William, ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail."

"The devil! How did you come here?" Dick demanded, sternly.

"Waal, part o' the ways on my feet, an' ther other two-thirds on my hands an' knees an' stum-mick!" the giant replied, with a grin.

"Then, you are my prisoner. If you were not content with the thrashing I gave you, a limb of a tree will perhaps do you," Deadwood Dick said.

"Hold on! I ain't a-goin' ter hang yet. Ef I ain't an angel, I am a-goin' ter try ter be one. Didn't ye git ther warnin' I sent to you, wi' old Avalanche?"

"Yes, and threw it in the fire. You are not sharp enough to fool me with chaff yet, my pilgrim."

"Thar warn't no chaff about it, Dick! my daisy, jest as sure's my frontpiece is Beautiful Bill. Ther war a fair shake I give ye, ter luk out fer ther major, an' ef ye didn't mind it, most likely yer fire is all dough."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! ye'll see, d'rectly, sure's I'm one o' ther detached planets from Jupiter. Old Howell an' a gang o' eighty galoots hev surrounded ye, an' ef they don't make it hot fer ye, I'll lose my surmise."

"By Heaven! I don't credit this. We've seen nothing of them."

"Mebbe not; but it's a fact, just so sure as ye gamboled my proboscis out o' kilter. Jest feast yer eyes on this nose, Dicky—ther 'reck o' former prominence. Don't ef make ye feel bad ter think thet ye war ther means o' sp'ilin' a fellar human's beauty, fer nothin'? But I forgive ye, my honeysuckle—I do, from ther soles o' my stogy boots, because ye did a first-class job. Ye licked me, and licked me 'til it did me proud, an' heer's my fist in eternal friendship."

And the giant thrust out his brawny hand. Deadwood Dick hesitated but a moment, then grasped it and shook it.

"I'll trust you," he said, "until I find you treacherous—then, I'll put a revolver-bullet through your thick skull. Excuse me if I am more emphatic than polite, but I am obliged to consider every man a treacherous rascal, in order to make my general estimation of the world correct. I consider every man my enemy, until he proves, beyond a doubt, that he is my friend."

"Don't blame ye a bit, an' ef ye ever ketch

ther Pet Elephant off his nut, jest salivate him, kerslap."

"Consider it settled. Though the belief is with me that your motives in this action are honest, I shall have you watched, lest the devil in you, and which infests every man's nature, may accidentally leak out, when I am not on my guard. Now, give me your advice as to this gang of cutthroats, under Major Howell."

Beautiful Bill did so, giving an accurate account of what he had heard and seen, while playing the spy.

After he had finished, Deadwood Dick accompanied him to the mess-room of the band, and ordered the cook to give him some supper.

In the meantime, he gave orders to have more pickets posted, for he was ill at ease—more so than he had ever been before at the prospect of a battle. This uneasiness was in a measure caused by the fact that a part of his men under an aide-lieutenant, named Farwell, were out on the road, and might return unexpectedly to the glade and be surprised and cut to pieces by the ruffians under the command of the Howells.

As for himself and those within the rendezvous, he had no fears.

CHAPTER VIII.

WATCHING AND WAITING.

DANDY ALF HOWELL concluded not to make the attempt to reach Deadwood Dick's cabin, inasmuch as such an undertaking would incur a great deal of risk of life, for he doubted not that the new heir of Dead Pine Tract had taken the precaution to post guards on the watch for enemies.

At the cabin Deadwood Dick was making ready for the battle which he was sure would come, and he meant not to be disappointed or surprised.

Several small howitzers he had had brought to the Tract, and these he ordered now into the second story of the cabin, with their noses pointed out of convenient windows, one in the east, west, north and south respectively.

They were mounted upon small trucks, and being loaded heavily, were the very thing for mowing down a crowd.

While Dick was superintending these arrangements, Stella Howell was by his side, watching without a remark the preparations for battle.

"Why are you making all these preparations, Mr. Harris?" she asked, at last, impelled no doubt by curiosity. "Are we going to have war here, on Dead Pine Tract?"

"It would seem so, when we are surrounded by nearly a hundred armed ruffians, under your uncle and cousin!" Dick replied. "They have come, no doubt, to take possession of the Tract!"

"And you will give it up to them?"

"No, lady—not while I have powder and lead to drive them back. Is it your wish that they should have the mine, here, and all that was your father's?"

"Oh! no, indeed. I want you to have it; I want every clause in poor papa's will obeyed!" the maiden cried, enthusiastically. "If you have a place for me, give me a gun, and I will fight as long as I have strength."

"No need for that, Miss Stella! What you could do in the way of fighting I will take off your hands and do myself, with pleasure," Dick said, gallantly.

"You may rest assured that if the invaders attempt to reach my claim, they will do so at the peril of their lives, for I shall fight to the bitter end, and render the name of Deadwood Dick a greater terror than it is."

"You are a brave man," Stella said, warmly, "although if all the stories about you are true, you are to some extent a wicked one, which I am loth to believe, you are so bold and hand—"

"No flattery, lady!" enjoined Deadwood Dick, as she paused in confusion. "I know what you would say, but I deny the accusation. Good looks I never laid claim to, the Lord only knows, and as for boldness, my life has made me too bold I fear."

"A man can not be too bold, in some ways—in others he can be so without trying very hard," Stella replied, as she turned away.

After arranging everything to his satisfaction above-stairs, Deadwood Dick descended to the first floor, to find Old Avalanche in the mess-room.

"Hello! you, Alva—how came you here?"

"Great ham-bone, Dickey, my jewel—how did I get hayr? How did ther old cavortin' cyclone o' ther North-west get hayr? Moses thet perigrinated off on ther ear uv a bullrush! I jest wafted down hayr on ther palatial car uv old

Aurora Bory Alice—a ginnywine thunderbolt o' extinction—a storm-cloud o' eternal annihilation an' extirpation, fac' by gracious! Jest gaze at me, Dickey, ye thoroughbred daisy—jest accelerate ther speed o' yer glance onto my royal ribs, and remark ef ye don't observe a teetotal change in ther old ragin' eppydemic o' ther per-rarers!"

"You do look somewhat enlivened, that is true," Dick replied, smiling at the old man's earnestness. "Your eyes seem to have a brighter luster, your mouth has resumed specie payment and you seem all cured of your lameness, although I can't see that your ears have grown much lately."

"No, Dickey, old Perriwinkle! Them ears won't neyver adorn my venerable skull, I reckon," the veteran muttered, rubbing his horny palms over the spots where those useful organs had once upon a time grown. "But thet ain't no sarcumstance—great archipelagological ham-bone, no! Jest luk at me, I'm as fresh as a spring lamb—as frisky as ther little sheep Mary had, w'at ye read about in the Catechisms. No longer is ther Great Annihilation a thing o' ther past, but ther livin' reality in boom'n' condishun—me, ther great devastatin' eppydemic o' these boreal lattitudes an' longytoads, an' my mare, Prudence Cordeliar, an' my goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale. Yes sir-ee, bobtail hoss! ther great cavortin' cyclone o' ther West an' ag'in in workin' order, an' hayr's w'at hes grown six years younger, inside o' five hours—fac', by gracious."

"Do I understand you, then, that you have recovered your goat and horse, old man?"

"Great International ham-bone, yes—recovered 'em, yes, on course I hev, Dickey, my transparent emblem o' virtue—ye Goddess of Liberty! On course I recovered 'em, an' this is how I did it. War settin' on ther steps down at ther Tontine, when a galoot he came waitzin' up on ther top o' a hoss, an' behind him dogged as sneakish a lukin' billy-goat as ever chawed cast-iron, an' don't ye fergit it, my posey. Great discomfited ham-bone thet discombobbered ther terrestyal gravitation uv old Joner! I know'd thet anamile ther mimit I spied her, an' et popped inter my head ther hev sum fun. So I jest hopped ter my fut, an' I sed, sez I, 'Qui vas senio las monto du diablo,' which war hoss-latin fer Prudence Cordeliar, ye consarned old son of a sea-cook, ye old devil! Waal, sir, thet sagacious anamile loked up an' glued her eye onto me; then she began ter whinny an' elevatin' her backsliding propensities, she sent that galoot w'at rid her, a-playin' leap-frog t'other side o' ther street, after which she walked serenely up ter me an' shuk hands, an' larfed as only a hoss can laff, till she high cried. An Florence she snickered too, an' thar on ther steps o' ther Tontine, we three component parts o' ther great devastatin' Annihilation ag'in leagued ourselves together fer ther purpose o' cavortin' about on another toor uv extirpation, in these yere pestiferous longytoads an' lattitudes."

"Well, I've business for you, right here, if you are spilling for a fight," Deadwood Dick said, smiling.

"Great ham-bone, yes; I know all about it, my daisy; an' ye kin reckon on ther Annihilation fer a part o' ther conflict. But, Dickey, thar's one thing I want ameliorated—that is to say, changed. Ther g'ard at ther door, he acctually refused ter admit my Florence an'—"

"I'll settle that," Dick said, with a laugh. "Come along, and the worthy joint of the annihilation shall have the best the establishment affords."

And, true to his word, Deadwood Dick had the venerable goat admitted to the mess-room, and furnished with a repast sumptuous enough for any goat to eat.

Florence evidently had a retentive memory, for she appeared to recognize the Prince of the Road, and rubbed about him, lovingly. She had grown more venerable looking of late, if not uglier, but had lost none of her love for a scrimmage, apparently, for she eyed Beautiful Bill with a twinkle in her eye, which would seem to express the sentiment that she hankered after giving his giantship an interview with her head gear—that knotted sledge-hammer-like battering-ram she knew so well how to manage.

The night wore on.

Those within the Rendezvous watched and waited, expecting momentarily to hear the first signal of the attack; but still it did not come.

What was the meaning of the delay?

Were the wolves of the Howells intending to starve out the little garrison? Or were they creeping up, previous to a big rush at the cabin?

These were the questions not easy to answer,

for there were no answers to them at present evidently. The moon had gone under a cloud, and outside was impenetrable darkness.

Not a foot before his face could a man see now; then the boom of thunder along the heavens predicted a storm.

Fully trusting his men, Deadwood Dick did not venture out into the night, but remained within doors directing those of his followers who were inside.

Avalanche with many of the principles of the true soldier, suggested several little additional improvements in regard to the defense, which Dick accepted with hearty thanks.

At home was the Annihilator, with his many odd, extraordinary stories and uncouth expressions, now that he had Florence to gambol and frisk at his side.

"Great ham-bone! why don't ther galoots git up and 'tend to their knittin', ef they want ter fight?" he grunted, as he approached Dick, who stood in the doorway of the Rendezvous, and gazed out into the black night. "If I war them pilgrims, I'd go bathe myself in the Sloughs o' Despond, or sum other such a place, and then dig me a hole in the ground, and crawl into it and pull it in after me."

"You'll see 'em soon enough," the Prince replied. "We shall have a big shower soon, and then can look out for 'em. Where's Calamity, Alva?"

"Ther Lord knows, Dickey, my peony. I ken't no more keep track w' that gal, than I kin o' a bat. She's heer, thar, an' all overs, jest whar her inclination leads her, an' I reckon ye needn't be surprised ter see her heer ter-night."

Louder and heavier boomed the thunder along the heavens, until it seemed to jar the very earth, while the lightning diffused itself in vivid glares.

On ascending the stairs, Dick found Stella Howell crouching in one corner of her room, trembling violently.

"Oh! Dick—Mr. Harris, I mean, I am so glad you have come. I was so afraid of the thunder."

And she glided forward and put her hands in his, confidingly, while she looked into his face for assurance.

"Afraid, were you?" the Prince asked, smiling down into her dilated eyes, admiringly. "Why a storm like the one that threatens us, is in perfect keeping with my nature, my little ward. It is grand. The crash of the thunder, the vivid hiss of the zigzag lightning, and the weird sound of the falling rain, are the sounds that thrill me with renewed life—fill my soul with a yearning to go forth and ride madly through the warring elements!"

"Oh! how can you? I am always timid in a storm like this. It must be nice to be so brave and courageous."

"There is no bravery in not fearing the storms of this life, Miss Stella. A man who trembles not at the sound of his Maker's voice, is not natural, or else he is a devout and sincere servant of the Lord; one or the other. But as unnatural and wild as they may be, I believe there is no man or beast not in a measure susceptible to God's influence, during a storm."

"I agree with you, indeed," Stella said, enthusiastically. "You are a philosopher, in your way, Mr. Harris."

"Perhaps I ought to be. But, don't call me Mr. Harris any more. It is a name that don't belong to me—Dick is what they call me—Deadwood Dick, and the name will cling to me as long as I live."

"It is just as well, so long as you are proud of it."

"I am not proud of it—of any thing. I despise a man who is proud of himself, his name, or any worldly possession. He is as much to be despised as the buzzard who gluts himself on carrion, and then is in misery the remainder of the day. No! I am not proud of the name of Deadwood Dick—I should be a contemptible sinner were I. It is not a name to be proud of, for there are many stains upon it, never to be washed out; yet, outlaw, road-agent, dare-devil though I have been, and am now, I have been driven on, step by step, by a people who have no mercy—who refused to let me alone, after I had hanged and thus paid the penalty of crime. So that, though my future prospects may not be pleasant to reflect upon, I have the consolation of knowing that no man has ever paid nature's debt by my agency, who was not at heart a ruffian and a villain, and whose death was not a relief to the community, and a favor to every honest man."

"And must you always live this wild, strange life?"

"Always!" Deadwood Dick replied, fiercely. "I am an outcast, and as such I have only to remain. Society or the public at large refuse to receive me. They are everlasting enemies. Go where I will, they hunt me and turn me abroad, because once I was a road-agent. They curse me, and drive me about, and I have no choice except between this life, and death."

"I, at least, pity you, and trust you," Stella said, putting her hands into his, warmly. "I don't believe you are bad at heart."

"Thank you, little lady. I hope I am not. But, I came here to speak of another thing—of your father's will. You have read it all through?"

"I have—and know of what you would speak: concerning my marriage. My answer is *yes*! It was evidently my father's wish, and did I loathe and despise you, which I do not, I should respect his wishes."

"I thank you, my little one," Dick said, bending and kissing her upon the forehead. "Your trust shall not be at fault. I shall send for a minister at once, having one who has been regularly ordained, in my band. He will marry us, and some other time, we will be wedded again to make all sure. This ceremony will make you equally my wife, and should I perish, the ruler of my band, who will stand by you, through thick and through thin."

After a few more words, the young chief took his departure, just as the sound of a rifle shot rolled along out of the forest.

"They've begun operations," he muttered, darkly, as he hastened down the stairs.

He found Old Avalanche and Beautiful Bill in the mess-room, while the rest of the men were positioned at loop-holes in different portions of the cabin.

The storm had burst forth in all its fury, the rain pouring down in torrents, and the thunder rumbling heavily an accompaniment to the lightning's vivid flashes.

"Great ham-bone! did ye hear that ar' shot?" the Annihilator demanded.

"Yes, I heard it," Dick replied. "Where did it come from?"

"Ken't say, tho' I'll allow they're gittin' red-dy fer a scrimmage."

"Let them come. If they don't git the worst of it, I'm mistaken."

A reconnaissance failed to see anything unusual out of doors, for it was inky black.

Leaving the cabin Deadwood Dick visited each of the out-posted sentinels, but they had no information. They had heard the report, but had seen no flash, nor any effects of the shot.

Returning to the cabin, he found that Avalanche had made a capture in the shape of a ragged, haggard-looking individual, who looked as if he had been in a hot conflict, but recently.

He was a tall brawny fellow, with iron-gray hair and ragged uneven beard to match; eyes black and complexion swarthy. His face was severely scratched and bled profusely, and one arm was worn in a sling.

His clothing and hat were of the most tattered description, and were soaking wet and covered with mire, as if the owner of them had been rolling in the mud.

"Great ham-bone thet bucked ag'in' ther larnyx of old Joner!" the Annihilator ejaculated, pointing, as the chief entered, to the waif of the storm, who lay half-reclining upon the floor. "Old Moses who war born in ther bull-rushes! Lookee hayr, Dickey, my jewel. Hayr's a pilgrin, who begged for kum in, an' I let him, fer I recky he's about canceled his yearthly dates."

"Who is he?"

"Great ham-bone! he sez 'as how his name is Mons'er Muckaloo, or sum sich like, an' thet he war travelin' toward Leadville, an' then cum in collision wi' ther gang out yonder, an' only escaped wi' his life."

Deadwood Dick turned and eyed the stranger suspiciously. He was so rough and illy-clad that a suspicion dawn upon his mind that he might not be all he claimed.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"M. Mulchfree," the man replied, with a slight accent of French.

"What is your business?"

"I am professionally a Parisian chemist, but of late I have been prospecting in the neighboring mountains for gold."

"You met with poor success, I should say, judging by your clothes?"

"Yes. I came near starving, and was making my way toward Leadville, when I encountered several ruffians in the woods back here, and in a battle with them got a sprained arm, a bullet hole through my side, and my face scratched up considerable."

"This probably accounts for the rifle report we heard then. Alva, you may dress the fellow's wounds, and give him some fodder."

Avalanche obeyed, and the Frenchman received the attentions gratefully.

On raged the storm without, the thunder rumbling and jarring and the lightning hissing spitefully into every crack and crevice.

During one of these awful glares, the door opened and Calamity Jane stepped into the cabin.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOLF, DISGUISED.

Yes, it was Calamity Jane, sure enough, who entered the rendezvous, from out the terrible storm. She had, in a measure, protected herself, however, from its fury, by wearing a long oilcloth coat, which reached nearly to her feet. She threw this aside, now, and shook the rain from her slouch hat.

"Phew! how it comes down," she said, with a quiet grin. "You ought to go out and wash the stains out of your character, as I've been doing, Dick."

"Thank you. I just came in," Dick replied. "The rain, I am afraid, would have little effect on the stains of my character."

"Pr'aps not. What are ye goin' to do?"

"In regard to a fight?"

"Yes."

"I scarcely know. Don't even know how matters stand in the camp of the enemy."

"You'll fight, of course?"

"Very likely. I never laid down my arms but once, and submitted myself to be hanged, and I shall not again, very soon."

"My words have come true. You remember I told you you'd be an outlaw, soon again, at the head of a band of men. Here you are, in the very position I predicted, with the people warring against you."

"Yes, you came pretty near the target, in that shot," the young chief replied, a dark scowl coming upon his brow. "I might have been a free man, to-day, had the people been at all merciful. Instead, I am an outcast and an outlaw, and the people are pushing me on, as fast and far as they dare."

"And always will be. And the quicker you can clear out of the country to some foreign clime, the sooner you will be rid of the curse that now clings to you."

"No! I will never run for them!" Deadwood Dick replied, sternly. "I will never run for them, a million to one though they may be. They shall keep me here in America as long as I have life, and shall feel the blighting influence of my hand, because of their treachery."

"Hurra! ther's ther way ter tork it!" the Annihilator burst forth in enthusiasm, while his eccentric goat gave an encouraging "ba-a-a!"

"Great chicken-livered ham-bone thet war ther last ailment uv old Joner! Dicky's squar' on ther track, thar, an' I'll bet my old socks on't. He's bin treated like as ef he war sum dishonorable coyote, an' ef he ain't got cause fer revenge, I don't know myself. Eh? Calamity, what d'ye say?"

"I agree with you, of course. You and I never disagree on any thing, you know," the dare-devil replied, with a smile, as she went up and shook hands with the veteran scout.

"No, Calamity, gal, we never differed in our opines, 'cept on one matter—ther breed o' my Florence Night-in-a-gale, you claimin' thet ther anamile war a 'sooner,' while I claim he ar' a 'setter'!"

"Well, we sha'n't even quarrel about that, Alva. Florence is a sagacious animal, and ten to one, there's nary another to match him. Hello! what have we here? Do my eyes deceive me, or is it an apparition I see?" for the dare-devil had suddenly caught sight of the formidable proportions of Beautiful Bill standing near at hand.

"No, you behold the Pet Elephant in the presence of his tamer," Deadwood Dick answered, laughingly. "With his spirit subdued, he makes a good pack-horse, on account of his size."

Later Calamity drew the chief to one side, and nodded toward the giant.

"Keep a look-out for that big brute, for, clever actor though he may be, you'll find to your cost that you are being deceived in him, and he will attempt to strike you a death-blow!"

"Then you don't believe in his sincerity, eh?"

"Not by a long shot! I've seen too many toughs of his calibre to believe them thoroughbred white-winged flutterers, you bet! It's easy enough for the galoot ter pretend friendliness ter you, but I tell you thar's nary a galoot as will stand up an' take a bastin' like he got, an' then turn around and luv ye fer playin' the gad."

"Well, maybe you're pretty near right; still, I am loth to believe that the giant has any evil intentions toward me."

"Well, maybe he hasn't, but time will prove. There is another thing that I have to speak about, and it is concerning the actress at the Coliseum."

"Miss Fanny Farron?"

"Yes. She has some devilment on foot, and you want to look out for her. She is as revengeful as a tigress, and is plotting to murder the girl you have up-stairs."

"By Heaven! no! She shall never touch a hair of Stella's head."

"I hope for your sake, that she won't; but you must look out for her, or some one who comes in her place. Has any suspicious character been seen around here, to-night, in disguise?"

"No. You, Alva, and the French chemist, have been the only new arrivals."

"The French chemist?"

"Yes—a poor wretch, who, after prospecting in the mountains, with no success, was pulling for Leadville, when he had an encounter with the enemy, out here, and got considerably bruised up."

"You are a fool!" Calamity said, half contemptuously—"a consummate fool."

"Why so? What do you mean?"

"Why, that pilgrim is a clean out and out fraud, and is no doubt a tool of Fanny Farron, sent here to do you injury. I now believe it to be the same galoot I was watching mutilate himself, back here in the woods. He scratched his face until it bled, whacked his arm with a club, and put a bullet through his side with a pistol. I reckoned another war was afoot, and he was preparing to escape the draft."

"It is no doubt the same fellow," Deadwood Dick replied. "Alva, where did he go?"

"Great ham-bone! last I see'd o' ther pilgrim, he had hobbled off to the pantry to get a drink," the Annihilator replied. "He asked me whar it was, an' I told him."

A hasty search was instituted for the disguised villain, and he was at last found in one of the adjoining rooms, apparently sound asleep upon a pile of blankets.

He sprang quickly to his feet, however, as Deadwood Dick, accompanied by Calamity and Avalanche, approached.

"Halt! don't move a muscle under pain of instant death!" the chief cried, sternly, leveling a revolver at the Frenchman's heart. "I have just learned a few things concerning you, and you may as well surrender, for your game is blocked."

"What do you mean?" the man growled, his eyes glittering.

"I mean to say, that if you don't drop the false hair you sport, instant, and let us have a square look at you, I'll salivate you in less time than it takes to say Jack Robinson, twice!" Dick replied. "Calamity, you assist him to remove the superfluous hair, and if he resists, I'll plug him."

The dare-devil stepped forward to obey, but the Frenchman waved her back, while he tore off a false beard and wig, and cast them on the floor, with a curse.

And there stood the actor, Wildcat Jack, *alias* Jacques Frouch.

"There! didn't I tell ye!" Calamity ejaculated, triumphantly.

"He's the chap what we see'd on the stage at the Coliseum, a few nights ago, and his name is Jacques Frouch."

"Cuss ye!" the man said, an evil glare in his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"I mean to hang you up to the limb of the nearest tree, if I find that you have done any mischief," Deadwood Dick replied, sternly. "Tell me what brought you here, you rascal."

"I shall tell you nothing," Frouch answered, sullenly. "You can go ahead and do as you choose, but you'll not get a peep out of me."

"I'll know about that directly. Alva, you may bind the villain, and station a guard over him. I want to learn if he has done any harm, before I hang him."

Accordingly the tool of Fanny Farron was bound hand and foot, and dragged into a strong room, where he was left.

Shortly after Deadwood Dick, accompanied by Calamity, Avalanche, and one John Rivers, a member of Dick's band, ascended to the rooms of Stella Howell, and a marriage ceremony was solemnized—the man Rivers officiating in the capacity of minister, he having been a minister of the gospel until a foul suspicion of murder was laid upon his shoulders, and he was forced to flee, and forsake his calling.

The marriage rites performed, there was a

general handshaking, and when Deadwood Dick descended to the mess room, he was vociferously cheered and congratulated by those of the band within doors.

Calamity remained with the young bride for awhile, and spoke in such glowing terms of Deadwood Dick that Stella in no way regretted the step she had taken.

Morning dawned, a wet and drizzling, disagreeable morning, with a cold, grayish pallor seeming to cling to everything, and a monotonous drip! drip! of falling rain that rendered the day lonely.

With the dawn of day observations were made that the enemy were still at their posts in the edge of the dead pines, although they were careful not to expose their persons as a target for the rifles of those within the Rendezvous.

Some of the men were in favor of opening the fight, but a word from Deadwood Dick caused them to desist.

Not first would the Prince or his men be to fire a hostile shot; if the people began the battle, they must abide the results thereof.

About noon Calamity came into the mess-room, her face deathly pale.

"Quick!" she gasped; "come up-stairs—your wife is dying."

Let us look in upon the camp of the Howells, about this time, and note the situation of affairs.

The Regulators, as they styled themselves, were still divided upon the east, west, north and south sides of Dead Pine Tract, Alf Howell and the major commanding the southern division. The men posted on picket duty were relieved by their comrades every hour, and thus were kept fresh in case of emergency.

Toward morning, when the storm was at its fury, a messenger arrived in camp bearing a note to the major, which read as follows:

"Come immediately. There is trouble here, and you are wanted!"

As the note was signed by Mrs. Howell, the major had hastened at once toward Leadville, leaving Alf in command.

Upon arriving at his mansion he admitted himself with a latch-key, and hastened to the library, which he had noticed from without was brilliantly lighted. Entering without ceremony, he found himself in the presence of his wife and two daughters—also two other females, one of whom was veiled, while the other he recognized as the variety theater singer, Fanny Farron.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively, as he stared around. "I am here!"

"Yes, you are here," Mrs. Howell replied, icily, "and now that you are here, perhaps you can explain yourself. This woman claims to be a former wife of yours, and proposes to put forward her claim upon you."

"My wife!" the speculator gasped, wheeling and facing the veiled woman. "By Heaven! what infamous plot is this against me? My first wife is in her grave, seventeen long years ago."

"No, you are mistaken," the veiled woman said, calmly uncovering her face. "Your first wife, and only lawful wife is still alive, and stands before you!"

It was a calm, well-preserved face, that of the strange claimant, with traces still plain where beauty had once lingered. The eyes were dark and fierce, and the hair threaded with gray.

Major Howell staggered back, as he saw the face, a strange, ghastly pallor sweeping over his own countenance.

"Aha! I see you recognize me!" the first wife exclaimed, triumphantly. "I thought you would."

"Curse you!" the speculator gasped, his fingers opening and shutting convulsively. "I thought I was rid of you, you she-devil."

"Look out, my dear major! Don't call me pet names, or I will fly at you and tear every hair out of your head. Old she-devil, am I? Who made me so, pray? Who deserted me, and ran off with my hard earnings? Who but you, you scoundrel?"

"I didn't—it's a lie!" the major blustered, edging off, as the returned Mrs. Howell advanced. "I never stole your money—never even married you, you old vixen!"

"Bah! you lie! you miserable thief!" No. 1 shrieked, growing momentarily more and more excited. "I have a marriage certificate that proves our union. Ha! ha! I shall have sweet revenge upon you, now, when I find you so rich

and prosperous, and so willing to give up your all to me, and start anew in life, with your family. I should be heartless, indeed, to trouble you, after you have given me all your present wealth. Ha! ha!"

"Furies seize you, you accursed virago. You shall not have a cent of my money, nor shall you disturb the peace of my household. I will murder you!"

And suddenly drawing a knife from a sheath upon his hip, the enraged speculator leaped toward his first wife, with a frightful oath.

But, the cold, deadly muzzle of a revolver peering suddenly into his face caused him to stop.

The weapon was held in the hands of Fanny Farron, and so firmly and steadily that the banker dare not advance.

"Halt!" she cried, cocking the weapon, coolly. "If you offer to do my mother harm, I will shoot you!"

"Your mother! your mother! What do you mean?"

"Just what you might infer from the words I spoke. I will put a bullet-hole through you if you offer to make us trouble."

"Who are you, then, girl?"

"Your only legitimate daughter, sir. Like-wise a halver in the division of the spoils," the actress replied, coolly. "Oh! you'll find us business, every time. You may as well tell the other females here, to pack up their 'Saratoga's' and scoot, for we sha'n't have 'em around, you can bet!"

"Curse you! Leave the house or I will have you forcibly ejected!" the speculator cried, trembling with furious emotion. "Do you think I shall tolerate such a scene as this in my own mansion? Go! I say; and there can be a settlement hereafter."

"Not much there won't be! We've took the fort, and now we're going to hold it. So the sooner you clear out your second brood, the better it will be for you, mark my word!" Mrs. Howell No. 1, said.

"He will not have to clear us out!" Mrs. Howell No. 2 answered, haughtily. "We will go of our own accord."

And motioning to her daughters, she left the room, followed by them, and they were shortly after heard leaving the house.

"Now, Major Howell, we are alone—you are alone with the wife and daughter whom you deserted years ago. How do you like the situation of affairs? How do you fancy the change made in the internal arrangement of your household?"

"Furies seize you!" the speculator raved chafing under the gaze of the silver-mounted weapon in Fanny Farron's hand. "What do you intend to do?"

"Well, since you have asked a sensible question, I will give you a sensible reply!" the first wife said, with a grin, her eyes flashing triumphantly. "I am a thorough going business woman—my whole life since you deserted me has been devoted to business, as I have had to depend on my wits for a livelihood. Now, we can amicably settle this thing, if I mistake not, or you can amicably shuffle off this mortal coil, and I will lay siege to your possessions when your bones are deposited in a box six feet beneath the ground."

"You would not murder me, woman, would you?"

"Yes, without the least compassion, if you refuse to do as I direct. Yonder table contains writing materials. Go and sit down, and you make me out a deed of all your real estate and personal property, and write me out a check for every farthing you have in banks or trust companies. Do this and you are free to go. Refuse, and you will never see the day dawn again!"

"Curse you! you dare not kill me!"

"Don't you believe that! We mean business, and shall not hesitate to take advantage of the present situation. The hour is propitious, and we could easily put you out of the way, and assume possession here. Come! go ahead! I shall not give you more than half an hour to write out the document."

With a growl that might have come from the throat of a lion, so savage it was, Major Howell went to the table, and sitting down, wrote rapidly, Mrs. Howell, the first, standing over him, and giving such directions as she saw fit.

When he had finished, she took the document, and a check which he had drawn up, and scanned them critically.

"That will do," she said, a moment later. "You may go now, as I have done with you! Fanny, here, will witness the deed, which will make it good in law."

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE DEED.

"Your wife is dying!"

Deadwood Dick and Avalanche sprung away up the stairs, in pursuit of the dare-devil, who only paused to give vent to the exclamation, when she hurried back up the stairs.

Straight to the room of Stella Harris, the new wife of Deadwood Dick, went the trio.

Poor Stella lay upon the bed, writhing and twisting in fearful agony, her screams most terrible to hear, indeed. Her face and form were contorted into unnatural shapes and expressions, resulting from the excruciating pain she was suffering, and she rolled and tossed from one part of the bed to another.

"In the name of Heaven, what is the matter with her?" Deadwood Dick gasped, shuddering as her frightful screams rent the air. "Tell me, Calamity—what is the matter with her?"

"God knows, I don't—unless it is from the pangs of hydrophobia or poison. She is dying, Dick!" the girl replied, tears standing in her eyes. "There, do not touch her; it will do no good, and you might get hurt. I tried to quiet her before I called you, but found it no use. She is in terrible pain, and will have to wear it off."

"Death will only wear it off, and put her outen her misery, ef she's bin pizened!" Alva said, "an' I reckon at be pizen, fer she cavorts around for all ther world, like old Peter Masters, who swallowed a dorg button, jest because Marier Potiphar wouldn't fine harness wi' him."

"Poison!" Deadwood Dick gasped, aghast. "Poison! Who could be so infernally devilish as to commit this crime? Not you, girl—?" and sternly the Prince of the Road turned his terrible gaze upon Calamity Jane—"not you?"

"Sir!" she replied, stepping back a pace, her face whitening, and eyes dilating, "me—I kill her? God forbid!"

"Now, lookee hayr; don't go fer ter ask any more sech questions, Dicky," the Annihilator said, solemnly. "Ye know C'lamity wouldn't do sech a thing, or at least ye orter, after you 've bin sorter pards so long. I'd wager my last cud o' terbacky ag'in' a belt on ther smellier, thet C'lamity never dreamed of such a thing."

"Full well I know it, too," Deadwood Dick responded, as he reached forth his hand. "You should have shot me, girl, for the foul suspicion, which came not from my heart. Shake, and forgive me. God knows I am not responsible for what I say or do, now, in this awful hour. Quick! somebody go for a doctor. There's a fellow below who is an expert physician—fetch him!"

Without a word, Calamity sped back, down the stairs, but soon returned, accompanied by that member of Dick's band, who had studied and practiced in the medical profession, before circumstances—a wrecked home and a faithless wife—drove him out upon the trail.

He shook his head as he saw the horrible agony of the girl.

"Can't do much for her, I'm afraid," he announced. "Has anything been given her that might have contained poison?"

Deadwood Dick turned to Calamity for the answer.

"Nothing," she replied, "since I've been here, except a cup of cold tea I brought her this morning. She even refused her breakfast, saying she was not hungry."

"Where did you find this tea?"

"In the pantry, below. It was standing cold in an earthen tea-pot, and I supposed it was all right."

"The tea was undoubtedly poisoned," the physician said, "and the symptoms of the patient confirm my first conclusion. But a drug has been used that is rare in this country. Among all the common mineral poisons, you will find none that will put a person in such horrible torture. The drug which I believe has been used in this case, is a preparation known only to the most expert French doctors, although its use is large in Paris."

"Is there no antidote?" Deadwood Dick demanded, his voice choked with emotion, and tears filling his eyes.

"None! The poor lady's suffering will not cease until death claims her, which, God granting, may be soon!" the physician said, reverently.

With a loud wail of anguish Deadwood Dick dropped upon his knees by the bedside, and sobbed aloud. Calamity, Avalanche and the physician also wept.

Horrible it was to see the poor victim in her agony, such as mortal seldom knows here on earth, as she tossed to and fro upon the bed—insensible to the grief of those true friends gath-

ered around her—unable to speak except in a scream of agony—sensible only to the awful torture that she experienced. Her hitherto fair pretty face was contorted terribly, the eyes and lips being tightly closed except when she screamed and features were drawn out of shape.

"Be calm, chief," the physician said, at last; "her pain is virtually over; she is dying. Scout! will you call Rivers?"

Avalanche hastened to obey, and the minister soon made his appearance by the bedside of the dying bride.

With tears in his eyes, he offered up an eloquent and touching prayer—prayed long and earnestly to God to stop the terrible torture, and ease the spirit of the dying girl in her last moments.

One by one, as they heard the news, the road-agents filed into the room, and stood watching with tearful eyes, for what was sorrow to them was double sorrow to their chief, in this hour of death.

John Rivers' prayer was seemingly answered, for at last poor Stella appeared to grow easier of her pain, and dropped off into a state resembling slumber, but which was in reality death, all the contraction of her features having disappeared, and a smile of peaceful rest frozen upon her colorless lips.

Thus died Deadwood Dick's bride, within the very day of their marriage.

"Weep no more, my friends," Rivers said, solemnly. "She has passed away to that bourne of everlasting peace where there is no pain, no dying, no marriage or giving in marriage, but where all is life and eternal joy in the sunlight reflecting from God's beaming face."

Then, convulsed with emotion, he left the room—left the mourners by the bedside of the lost bride.

Long they remained there in silent prayer; then, when they arose as if by intuitive consent, it was found that Deadwood Dick had fainted.

Strong though he was, and generally a master over his emotions, he had at last succumbed to this unexpected and terrible blow.

"Gentlemen, if you will carry him to his room," Calamity said, addressing those of the band who stood around, "I will care for him."

Eager were they to obey, and the chief soon lay upon the bed in his own room, and Calamity and Avalanche were left to bring him back to consciousness.

It was not a hard job, and they soon had him sitting upright upon the bed, fully restored.

"You fainted," Calamity said, quietly, in answer to his inquiring look around. "You had better lie still, for awhile, until you regain your strength."

"Bah! I shall never be stronger than now, to strike the murderer of my wife. It was the accursed Frenchman's hellish work, and he shall pay the penalty of his crime. Come, Avalanche, I would have you with me. Calamity, can I look to you to care for her?" And the chief's voice grew hoarse with emotion.

"I will do all I can," Calamity replied, tears springing to her eyes. "You know I would not refuse you, even though you—you suspected me, Dick."

"Tut, tut, Jennie, my dear girl! Banish the remembrance of that wrong from your mind. I was mad to think of such a thing. I now know that you would sooner kill yourself than her."

And pressing her hand in his, he turned and accompanied Avalanche.

Down the stairs they went, and to the mess-room.

The band were all assembled in the mess-room, the pickets having been called in. Each man sat with bowed head; a few were huddled together, talking in low tones.

They all looked up, however, when Deadwood Dick entered—Deadwood Dick, looking so pale and calm, that they felt something was about to transpire.

Nor were they wrong.

He paused in the center of the floor and gazed around—saw sympathy plainly written in each face—knew that each and every man there was ready to strike for him.

"Comrades," he said, after a moment, "you have doubtless heard of the hellish crime that has been committed, by which my bride has been stricken suddenly down. You all know the measure generally meted out to a murderer, and it shall apply to this case as well as to others. Bring out the Frenchman who is imprisoned in the strong room."

A couple of stout fellows sprung forward to do the chief's bidding. The door was flung open; then they stepped back as if in surprise.

"He is not here, chief!" they exclaimed.

"Not there!" Deadwood Dick cried, leaping forward. "By Heaven! there is treachery here. What has become of the man?"

"Yas! w'at hes becum o' ther galoot?" grunted Beautiful Bill, striding up. "Show me ther cuss ef he's a candidate for Judge Lynch's noose; let ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail adjust his necktie ter fit like a hoop on a pork barrel!"

"What have you against the villain?" Deadwood Dick demanded, sharply, turning so suddenly upon the giant as to cause him to start in his tracks.

"Kerwhoop! plants o' Jupiter and Satan! W'at hev I ag'in' ther cuss—I, Beautiful Bill, ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail! Waal, now, ef I hain't hed my fill o' thet galoot, I'll sell out cheap, you bet! Skinned me eleven straight games o' poker, he did, at two dollars a whack, an' don't ye fergit it."

"Man, I am tempted to believe that you set the French devil at liberty!" the Prince of the Road cried. "Can you look me straight in the eyes and say that you didn't?"

"Can I? Great luminary planets o' Jupiter an' catapultian Satan, yes! Eye fer eye, I do declare that I didn't hev anything ter do w' lettin' out ther cuss, and didn't know nary a thing about it. Pile a stack o' Bibles and Webster's Dicksyonarys on ther ground as high as Porkypine Peak, an' up 'em I'll go, as spry as a spring kitten, an' standin' on ther e'ena-most top, I'll wave my banner an' yell, 'I didn't hev nuthin' ter do w' et!' Jab yer bowie inter my pulsometer; agitate my spine w' a bucket o' water drawn from Greenland's icy river—ay, squirt a stream o' aged terbaccy-juice plum in my eye, an' still w' martyr-like fortitude, I'll send forth the cry, 'I didn't take no hand in thet ar' deal!'" the giant cried, tragically.

Deadwood Dick turned grimly to his comrades, his face darkening.

"Search the cabin and the immediate neighborhood, and you may yet recover the prisoner," he commanded. "Take him dead or alive. A hundred dollars to the man who returns either him or his carcass here!"

"Thet's business!" Beautiful Bill cried, enthusiastically pounding his breast; "you hit me right thar ter a capital dot, my beloved chief. A hundred gold shiners more will I add ter ther pile fer the capture o' ther Frenchson o' a horse-eater, an' fer ther privilege o' placin' ther neck-lace o' justice about his neck!"

"You keep still! You may get it about yer own windpipe!" Avalanche cautioned.

"Keerect, my scrimped-up, leetle old sucker—keerect. When his lordship, ther noble Dick Deadwood shall ordain that ther proper moment has arriv fer me, Beautiful Bill, Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail, ther shuffle off this mortal stage-road o' life, I shall be ready ter peregrinate—ter transport myself with ther utmost fortitude ter ther realms o' Jupiter an' Satan."

A hurried but careful search of the rendezvous was made, but nothing of the Frenchman could be found; neither did out-of-door search discover him.

Somehow he had escaped, but how?

He could not have got out of the strong room without hands and help from the outside, and such help he had surely had.

But, who was the guilty man, then?

Was it the giant, despite all his protestations of innocence, or was it some other member of the band?

This was the momentous question which puzzled Deadwood Dick, even as the escape of Jacques Frouch angered him. Apparently there was no way of throwing light upon either of the subjects, which made it the more exasperating.

Calamity came down, after awhile, and the Prince of the Road made known to her what had transpired.

"Beautiful Bill's your huckleberry, mark my word," she said, when he had done. "I calculated he'd hit you a stab and he's done it. He'll do it again if you don't lynch him, on the spot."

"I don't like to believe that he'd lie so to me."

"Pshaw! he can lie as easy as he can drink whisky, which ain't no trouble at all, you bet."

Deadwood Dick was not quite satisfied. He had placed confidence in the giant, since his "coming over," such as he seldom placed in mankind, and he could not well believe that he was mistaken in the honesty of the chap. A keen sense of perception generally served him in lieu of a detective's judgment.

The day passed slowly away.

Sharp watch was kept from the Rendezvous for the self-styled Regulators who infested the woods around the Tract, but nothing could be seen of them. Thoroughly hidden among the

dead pines did they keep, if indeed they were still there.

By Deadwood Dick's direction, some of the members of the band set to work and manufactured a coffin-shaped box, out of such material, and with such tools as were on hand.

This was then filled with dry leaves covered over with a white blanket, and the body of poor Stella was laid upon them—her last resting-place here below.

A beautiful corpse she made, for Calamity's deft hands had been at work in arranging her body for the grave.

Just as dusk threw its mantle over the earth, a deep grave was dug beneath the floor of the cabin, the flooring having been torn up for this purpose. When completed the coffin was lowered into the grave, and John Rivers read a short but touching burial service, after which the remains were covered up, in the presence of many a tearful eye, and the floor replaced.

Deadwood Dick was seen no more for a couple of hours, but when he again appeared, he was attired in full riding costume, and was armed to the teeth.

"Now where?" Calamity asked, in surprise.

"To Leadville," he replied. "You need scarcely ask what for; I am going to hunt down the murderer of my bride."

"But you are not going to attempt to go through the Regulators?" Calamity asked, anxiously.

"Bah! yes. I fear them not, though they may number an army. I am a free man, and they have no right to stop me. If they do, I shall kill every man that raises a hand against me."

"How about matters here?"

"It is of that I would speak. I leave everything in your hands—in your command. In case of an attack before I return, do the best you can—that is all I could do. Don't touch the giant, unless you have positive proof of the guilt in which you may believe him concerned."

"Very well. I will take charge, and do as I believe you would do—fight in self-defense, if it should come to that. In case we have to light out, I'll fire the cabin. Should you not find us here on your return, look in the Leadville post-office for a letter for Elijah Goff."

"All right. I will trust all to your management. It is sufficiently dark now, and I am off."

Shaking hands with Calamity and Avalanche, and addressing a few words to the band, Deadwood Dick then left the cabin, and mounting his horse which was held in waiting for him, he galloped away toward Leadville's electric city, through the gloom of the night.

A few hours before, Jacques Frouch had entered the town, covered with dirt, as though he had been crawling through the mud. Escaped had he from the Rendezvous, in a way unsuspected by those within the cabin.

He had found a board in the floor loose, and carefully raising it he had slipped beneath the floor, and allowed the board to spring back into its place. To crawl from in under the cabin was but a trifling task, and in the course of an hour he had stealthily made his way out of the Tract and into the forest, without being once halted, for he passed the Regulators unnoticed.

Grimly triumphant over his success, he hastened toward the town.

"Now for *la belle Fanny*!" he muttered, "and the glorious prospect of coming in for the larger share of her harvest from her rich progenitor, Major Howell. Ha! ha! I'll then be independent of the stage and its mockeries—I shall be virtually made."

Thus musing, he made his way to his stopping-place, where he repaired to some extent his personal appearance, after which he dropped into a saloon and imbibed a stiff drink of whisky. Then, in high spirits, he made his way to the Howell mansion, and mounting the steps, rung the bell.

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF A ROPE AND A YARN.

Nor long had the Frenchman to wait, for the door was soon opened by a servant.

Pushing him rudely aside, Frouch entered the hall, and listened. Voices were audible coming from an upper parlor, and accordingly Frouch ascended with as much liberty as though he were in his own mansion, leaving the gaping servant to stare after him, in bewilderment too great for expression.

To the parlor the villainous Frenchman wended his way, and entered without the usual formality of knocking. Indeed, he already consid-

ered himself joint lord and master of the situation with Mrs. Howell.

The mother and daughter were seated near a marble center-table as he entered, engaged over a late luncheon and a bottle of wine—some of the rare old vintage the major had imported from the east for his own express use. A strong lip for spiritual consolation had these new heirs, and they meant to improve the time ere their sway of the scepter should cease.

They sprung to their feet, however, when they beheld Jacques Frouch smiling at them, from near the doorway.

"You here?" the actress cried, coldly. "I thought and hoped you were dead."

"And consequently you were badly deceived," Frouch replied. "Mistakes will happen, you know. And now that I am returned, no doubt you are overjoyed to see me!"

"I must confess that I am not. You are nothing to me!"

"Curse you!" the Frenchman gasped, his swart face growing blacker; "is *this* the game you are trying to play with me? If so, you'll find it won't work worth a continental cent. You promised to marry me if I would poison Deadwood Dick's ward, and now you must keep your promise. You can't play none of your games on me."

"But, you have yet to keep your part of the contract," Miss Fanny said, craftily.

"No! by Heaven the girl is dead—was dying in horrible agony, when I left the Rendezvous."

"Good! I am then rid of one obstacle standing between me and Deadwood Dick, and now I shall rid myself of another!" And as she spoke the actress drew a cocked revolver from her bosom, and quickly leveled it at the heart of Wild Jack. "Now you git, or I'll make a sieve out of you in quicker time than you can wink."

"Blast you! what do you mean, girl?"

"I mean, that if you bother me any more, I'll make a candidate for a coffin, just as you did Deadwood Dick's ward. Go! clear out! I want no more to do with you. If you ever come here again, I'll shoot you on the spot!"

"You will never live to do that, my beautiful liar. Ze devil will take your soul and burn it in ze sulphur pit, and zat will be ample revenge for ze wrong you have done me. I go now—not because I fear you, but to lay a trap for you that will never fail in its bite. Ha! ha!"

And turning, the Frenchman laughing demoniacally, left the room, and, as the women supposed, the house, as they presently heard a door slam.

But not yet did the villain quit the house. Skulking along through the rear hallway, he at last gained that region of domestic bliss known as the kitchen.

It was unoccupied, and he had things all to himself. Entering the pantry, he took from his pocket a small bottle, and poured a few drops of it over bread, meat, and such other provisions as were standing around upon the shelves.

"The same that is good for the victim is good for the plotter," he said, with a devilish chuckle. "If they appease their appetites, you Jacques Frouch will have ze revenge you thirst for. Now, for to get out of ze town, before ze authorities want me. Ha! ha!"

Hurrying stealthily from the house, he sought a livery and sale stables in State street, and there purchased, cheap for ready cash, a fine saddle-horse.

It was dark when he left Leadville's twinkling lights behind, but striking into the well-beaten trail leading to Fairplay, he galloped off at a leisurely gait. Not afraid was he of the darkness, for it corresponded with the hue of his nature, and then, he had once belonged to an outlaw gang, whose depredations were chiefly committed under the cover of darkness.

Fairplay was but a few miles from the carbon city of Leadville, and was peopled by even a rougher class of people, among whom, the Frenchman believed he might find protection, should he be pursued.

The road to the objective mining camp was part of the way along ragged bluffs, and then again it emerged into deep, silent bodies of pine timber, where nature's sounds were seldom disturbed.

The timber was so black and grim in appearance, that Jacques Frouch looked around him sharply as he rode into it, the thought of road-robbers coming into his head.

It was just such a location as they might choose, and he quickened the gait of his horse, nervously.

Not really frightened did he grow, until he heard hoof-strokes ringing behind him, and before him, and it dawned upon his mind that he was being hedged in. Whether by road-agents or by servants of the law he was unable to conclude, but he saw the advisability of reining in his horse and dismounting, under the pretense of examining a shoe upon his horse's foot. This he did in hopes that he would escape particular notice.

But, he was destined to disappointment, for, up from the east galloped a single horseman, clad in black, masked, and armed to the teeth—up from the west came a dozen men to match, and all halted but a few feet from Frouch, who was in secret trembling with terror from top to toe.

With the single nocturnal rider the band seemed to exchange signals; then the single horseman rode closer to Jacques Frouch, a cocked revolver in his right hand.

"Jacques Frouch!" a stern, cold voice said, "you are a doomed man. I have trailed you down to the spot whereon you die. If you would make peace with your God and Maker, I give you five minutes to do so in. Then, you shall be lynched—the fate of nearly every murderer in this wild region. Death will be too good for you, hellish monster that you are, and death you shall suffer as you have caused others to suffer!"

The French assassin dropped upon his knees, and began to beg piteously. He recognized the voice of the speaker as that of Deadwood Dick, and knew that he stood a slim chance of living, when once trailed down by the noted Prince of the Road—a man who returned blow for each blow struck him by his foes.

"Who are you?—for God's sake spare me," Frouch cried, in a supplicating tone.

"No, I'll not spare you, for Deadwood Dick never spares a man who wrongs him as you have. You shall die, and you have four minutes left to pray in!"

"Spare me! I beg! I beg! I'll not do anything of the kind again!" the craven cried, in a sniveling tone.

"No, I'll warrant you won't!" Deadwood Dick replied. "Ha! who'd think you were the brave hero of drama at the Coliseum, to see you here upon your knees? Come, boys, get the rope ready!"

The road-agents—who were a body of Dick's main band who had been absent from the Rendezvous for several days—obeyed with alacrity, and a noose was soon dangling over a limb, with the pulling end of the rope in the hands of a half dozen strong knights.

Seeing that there was not the shadow of a hope for him, Jacques Frouch began to cry piteously, then curse, between breaths.

Nor did he stop, until he was lifted bodily from the ground, his head inserted through the noose, and he was swung off into eternity.

The sign of the Double Cross was then stamped upon his forehead, after which there was a consultation between Deadwood Dick and his men, and they mounted and rode off in different directions.

Straight toward Leadville the chief went, an ugly expression about his mouth, and a deadly glitter in his eyes. Before entering the town, he dismounted, and left his horse in a thicket of maples, while he also assumed a disguise, consisting of a change of clothing, and a wig and false beard.

When he had completed his disguise, he left the thicket, and boldly entered the town.

Everywhere was excitement.

News had got abroad of the murder by poisoning, of two females, in the mansion of Major Howell—also it was reported that the major was missing, together with his wife and two daughters.

Mystery was there everywhere.

But, when, with the crowd, Deadwood Dick entered the mansion to view the dead, he saw two bloated, distorted corpses, and one of them belonged to the variety actress, Fanny Farron.

Fate had overtaken her in the end.

At the camp, shortly after Deadwood Dick's departure, hostile preparations were observed by Avalanche among the Regulators on the edge of the Tract for a battle. Bonfires were built in four places—east, west, north and south from the Rendezvous, and men could be seen fitting around them.

"Great domestica'd ham-bone thet war a war-hoss ter old Joner!" the Great Annihilator exclaimed, calling the attention of Calamity Jane to the fact.

"Looker thar, will ye! Old Moses uv ther bullrushes, don't thet luk as ef we war goin' ter hev sum fun? Kerwhoop! sound ther dinner-gong—peel forth yer hoss-anners, for we're goin' ter hev er scrimmage—a genywine rantankerous old scrimmage—a cavortin' old battle arter ther anshent style."

"Royal planets uv Jupiter an' Satan! whar's ther fight? Show unter me ther smell o' fight, an' let me inhale ther delicious odor—me ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail—the Apollo o' ther Colorados, Beautiful William!" roared the giant, prancing up. "Ready ar' I fer sanguinary strife, frum head ter heels, frum tooth ter toe-nails—an' thar's nary a mortal man 'cept one as durst breathe ther word 'fight,' when my noble presence looms nobly on hand, an' thet galootious pilgrim he be Deadwood Dick. Yes, sar, Deadwood Dick—jest jot thet cognomen in yer bank-book. Deadwood Dick et war who licked me, my pilgrims—licked me as I never war licked since my old mammy used ter whale me over ther pate w' the parental bootjack. Licked me slick an' clean, did Deadwood Dick, until I warn't wuth a stale cud o' terbaccy. An' I ain't afear'd ter own ther corn, but I do say thar's nary another pilgrim as kin do ther same leetle job."

"Don't believe thar is," Avalanche replied, "but, my dear sweet William, ef ye war avoirdupoised several hundred pounds less, an' I war as young in years as ye be, I opine, right hayr, thet I ked slap ye onter yer back so quick as ary skipper sunk one o' his fangs inter fresh cheese."

"Here! no quarreling, now. Get your weapons, and prepare for a fight!" Calamity commanded. "Here come the hellions, now!"

It was even so. From out the dead pines the Regulators swarmed, and rushed toward the Rendezvous. Volley after volley the road-agents poured into them; then Calamity led them boldly out into the night, for their only salvation seemed in cutting their way through to liberty.

Foe met foe in a wild bloody affray of death, and then—

Deadwood Dick received a letter through the Leadville post-office the next day, and it proved to be from Calamity Jane, written in a neat feminine hand.

It ran as follows:

"The battle is over and as you probably know, we had to pugkachee because of overpowering numbers of the enemy. We fit our way out, without losing a man, and foremost in the battle were the Annihilator and Beautiful Bill. They were the heroes of the fight, together with Prudence Cordella and Florence, the goat. Major Howell and his son, Alf, fell in the first charge, and I think were killed. We are in the mountains, at your old stronghold, where you may easily find us. Truly yours,

"CALAMITY JANE."

Right here it is proper to end this romance, and therefore we write

Exeunt Omnes.

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